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# States with revenue deficits may face fiscal stress: Centre

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Finance Ministry has warned that States with revenue deficits and high debt burdens will find it harder to deal with fiscal shocks, including from the West Asia crisis, forcing them to either reprioritise expenditure away from productive areas, or approach the Centre for more funds at a time when it is trying to consolidate its own finances.

In its Monthly Economic Review for April, the Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry said nine of the 18 large States analysed were in revenue deficit as per their own projections for 2026-27. Seven are projected to be revenue surplus, while one is

in revenue balance.

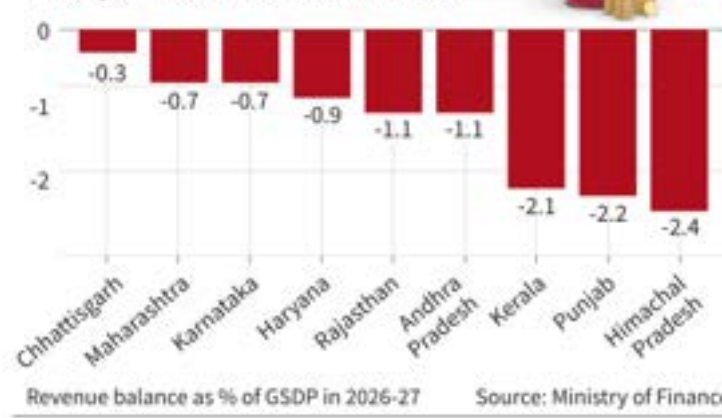
A revenue deficit is when expenditure on recurring items such as salaries, pensions, subsidies, and interest payments exceed the revenue earned from sources such as taxes and fees.

The States with projected revenue deficits as a percentage of their gross state domestic products (GSDP) are Himachal Pradesh (-2.4%), Punjab (-2.2%), Kerala (-2.1%), Andhra Pradesh (-1.1%), Rajasthan (-1.1%), Haryana (-0.9%), Karnataka (-0.7%), Maharashtra (-0.7%), and Chhattisgarh (-0.3%).

Tamil Nadu and West Bengal were excluded from the analysis as they have so far presented only interim budgets for 2026-27. "Revenue-deficit States

## In the red

Nine of the 18 large States analysed by the Ministry of Finance are in revenue deficit



are constrained by the debt servicing obligations and carry, on average, significantly higher outstanding liabilities than revenue-surplus States, and many of them spend more than 15% of their revenue receipts on interest pay-

ments," the report noted.

Of all the States analysed, Punjab has the highest projected ratio of interest payments to revenue receipts of 22.8%.

"States simultaneously running a revenue deficit and high outstanding lia-

bilities have fewer degrees of freedom to respond to fiscal shocks," the report said. "Specifically, they may have to resort to expenditure restructuring or may demand higher central transfers to meet the present unforeseen shocks."

On the other hand, the report highlighted the States that were doing fiscally well. The eight States with projected revenue surpluses as a percentage of their GSDPs are Odisha (3%), Jharkhand (2.5%), Uttar Pradesh (1.6%), Goa (1.3%), Gujarat (0.8%), Uttarakhand (0.6%), Telangana (0.3%), and Bihar (0.1%). "Notably, eight States which have budgeted revenue surpluses for 2026-27, save for Telangana, have their capital out-

lay as a percentage of State GDP higher than their projected fiscal deficit," the report said.

It highlighted the example of Odisha: while the State's 3.5% fiscal deficit is higher than the 3% norm, the fact that it is in revenue surplus and its capital outlay is 6.5% of GSDP "mark it as a case of deliberate investment rather than fiscal stress".

"States that are unable to maintain the golden rule of fiscal financing, that is, zero revenue deficit, will face increased stress as a result of the present crisis," the report said. "Stressed states with compressed fiscal space make demands on the Centre at precisely the moment that the Centre is attempting consolidation."

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Revenue Deficit:** This occurs when the government's "living expenses" (salaries, pensions, interest) exceed its "regular income" (taxes, fees). Imagine a household borrowing money just to pay for groceries and electricity—it adds debt without creating any new assets.
- **Fiscal Deficit:** The total gap between total expenditure and total income. It represents the total borrowing requirement of the government.
- **GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product):** The sum total of all goods and services produced within a state's borders. It is the yardstick used to measure the size of a state's economy.
- **Capital Outlay/Expenditure:** Spending that creates assets, like building highways, schools, or dams. This is "productive" spending because it generates future economic returns.
- **Debt Servicing:** The money required to cover the payment of interest and principal on outstanding loans. When this ratio is high, a state becomes a prisoner of its past borrowings.
- **Fiscal Consolidation:** The process of reducing the fiscal deficit and debt-to-GDP ratio through revenue enhancement and expenditure rationalization.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis revolves around the "**Fiscal Resilience**" of Indian states. The central argument is that states with persistent revenue deficits are uniquely vulnerable to external shocks (like geopolitical crises in West Asia).
- **The Debt-Deficit Trap:** Nine large states are projected to remain in revenue deficit by 2026-27. These states are caught in a cycle where they borrow not to build, but to survive. For instance, Punjab's interest-to-revenue ratio of 22.8% means nearly a quarter of its earnings vanishes before a single rupee is spent on development.
- **The "Golden Rule" of Finance:** The report emphasizes that the ideal fiscal state is one where the revenue deficit is zero. This ensures that all borrowed money is funneled into capital outlay—investing in the future rather than consuming the present.
- **Strategic Investment vs. Fiscal Stress:** A high fiscal deficit isn't always "bad." The analysis of Odisha shows that a state can have a higher fiscal deficit (3.5%) but remain healthy if it maintains a revenue surplus and invests heavily in capital (6.5% of GSDP). This is "deliberate investment."
- **The Squeeze on the Centre:** When states fail to manage their finances, they inevitably turn to the Union for more funds. This creates a friction point, as the Centre is simultaneously trying to lower its own deficit levels.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The tension between Central and State finances has evolved through distinct phases in Indian history:
- **Pre-Independence to 1950:** The Government of India Act, 1935, laid the groundwork for the distribution of tax powers, which was largely adopted by the Constitution.
- **The Era of Planned Development (1951–1990):** States were heavily dependent on the Planning Commission. Fiscal deficits were common as the focus was on massive public sector building.
- **The 1991 Crisis and Reforms:** The Balance of Payments crisis forced India to look at fiscal discipline. This led to the eventual enactment of the **FRBM Act (2003)** at the Centre, which nudged states to pass their own Fiscal Responsibility Legislations.
- **The 14th and 15th Finance Commissions:** The 14th FC significantly increased the states' share of the divisible pool (to 42%), giving them more "fiscal space" but also more responsibility.
- **Post-Pandemic Shift:** COVID-19 saw state debts skyrocket. Current trends show a divergence: some states have used the recovery to consolidate, while others remain stuck in high revenue-expenditure patterns.

- **Way Forward**

- **Adherence to the "Golden Rule":** States must prioritize eliminating the revenue deficit so that all borrowing is used for asset creation.
- **Broadening Tax Base:** States should look beyond GST (e.g., professional taxes, property taxes, and mining royalties) to increase their Own Tax Revenue (OTR).
- **Outcome-Based Budgeting:** Instead of focusing on how much was *spent*, states should report on what was *achieved* (e.g., kilometers of road built per crore spent).
- **Independent Fiscal Council:** Setting up a non-partisan body to vet state and central budgets could prevent "window dressing" of accounts and off-budget borrowings.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Mains 2023 (GS 3):** "Explain the concept of Fiscal Policy. What are its main objectives in the context of a developing country like India?"
- **Mains 2021 (GS 3):** "The State governments' fiscal health is a matter of concern. Discuss in the light of the FRBM Act."
- **Mains 2017 (GS 2):** "How have the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission of India enabled the states to improve their fiscal position?"
- **Prelims 2020:** Question regarding the "Interest Coverage Ratio" and "Fiscal Deficit" definitions.

# STATE FISCAL HEALTH: A UPSC COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

## The 'Golden Rule' of Fiscal Financing.



**CAPITAL OUTLAY**

**REVENUE DEFICIT**

- Aim: ZERO Revenue Deficit
- Borrowed Funds = Asset Creation (e.g., Road Icon)
- Avoid Unproductive Expenditure (e.g., Pension Hand icon)

## Deliberate Investment vs. Fiscal Stress.

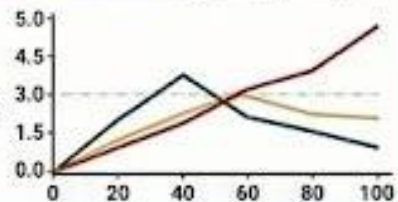
**Fiscal Stress (Bad)**



**Deliberate Investment (Good)**



**Odisha: Higher Fiscal Deficit (3.5%) is acceptable because Revenue Surplus (3.0%) exists and Capital Outlay (6.5%) is very high.**



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## Vulnerability to Shocks (High Debt states)

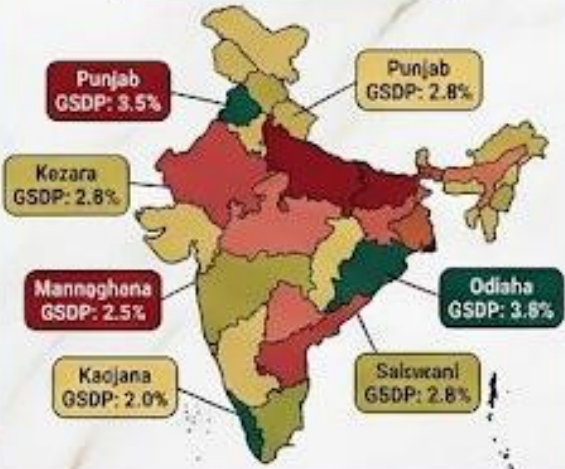
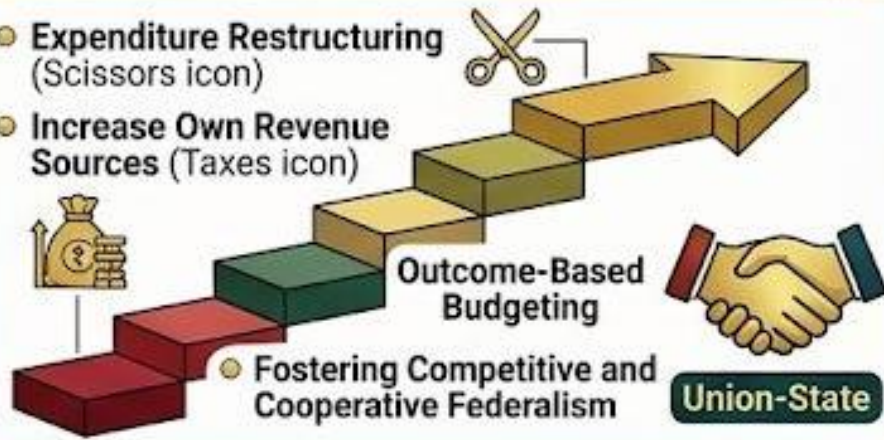


- States with high debt (e.g., Punjab 22.8% Interest) have low 'degrees of freedom'
- External shocks force reprioritisation or Centre approach



## Path to Consolidation and Sustainability.

- Expenditure Restructuring (Scissors icon)
- Increase Own Revenue Sources (Taxes icon)



# Iran vows to protect its nuclear programme

Both sides are locked in a stalemate after having blocked shipping through the Strait of Hormuz

Blockade to continue until Iran agrees to a deal on the nuclear issue, says U.S. President Trump

Iran President says Persian Gulf is 'inseparable' part of Iran's identity, blockade 'doomed to fail'

## Stanly Johnny

Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said on Thursday that the country would "safeguard" its "nuclear and missile" capabilities and lay down new rules for managing the Strait of Hormuz, hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said a blockade of Iranian ports would remain until a nuclear deal is reached.

"A new chapter for the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz is taking shape," he said in a statement, marking Persian Gulf Day.

"The Islamic Republic will secure the Persian Gulf region and dismantle the enemies' exploitative schemes in this waterway. The legal frameworks and implementation of new management for the strait will bring peace and pro-

gress to the benefit of all the region's nations," he said.

The war on Iran, launched by the U.S. and Israel, has turned into a maritime battle of wills after Mr. Trump announced a ceasefire on April 8. While the ceasefire is still holding, Iran's chokehold of the strait, the mouth of the oil-rich Persian Gulf, remains intact. The U.S. has imposed a blockade on Iran-linked vessels in the Gulf of Oman to exert economic pressure on Tehran.

Last week, U.S. media reported that Iran made a proposal to the U.S. via Pakistan promising to ease its control of the strait in return for the U.S. lifting its blockade. Iran said it would discuss outstanding issues, including the nuclear programme, in the second round.

Mr. Trump, in an inter-



view, said on Wednesday that he wanted a deal from Iran addressing America's core concerns, including the nuclear issue.

"The blockade is somewhat more effective than the bombing... They want to settle. They don't want me to keep the blockade. I don't want to [lift the

blockade], because I don't want them to have a nuclear weapon," he said.

Iran has always maintained that its nuclear programme is for peaceful purposes.

Mr. Trump, who ordered U.S. bombing of Iran's nuclear facilities in June 2025, had then said

he had "obliterated" the nuclear programme.

Mr. Khamenei on Thursday said Iranians would safeguard all of the country's technological advances, including the nuclear and missile programmes. Iranians "will regard all their national identity capacities – spiritual, human, scientific, industrial, and foundational and cutting-edge technologies, from nano and bio to nuclear and missile – as their national capital, and will safeguard them just as they do their maritime, land, and air borders," he said in the statement.

## 'U.S. causing insecurity'

He added that the U.S. presence is the "most important factor of insecurity" in the region. "America's illusory bases lack even the ability to ensure their own security, let alone any

hope that America could provide security for the region's dependents and Americanophiles."

U.S. Central Command stated on Wednesday in a social media post that it had reached a "significant milestone after successfully redirecting the 42nd commercial vessel attempting to violate the blockade".

There are "41 tankers with 69 million barrels of oil that the Iran can't sell", it said. Oil prices soared to four-year highs on Thursday, with the global benchmark Brent spiking more than 7% to \$126.41 a barrel for June delivery.

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said the Persian Gulf is an "inseparable" part of Iran's identity, adding that the U.S. blockade is "doomed to fail". "As we have repeatedly announced, the presence and

interference of foreigners will not help improve security in the region but will create tension and disrupt lasting peace in the Persian Gulf," he said in a statement. Mr. Pezeshkian added that Iran would adhere to "the principles of freedom of navigation and maritime safety, except for hostile countries".

Iran's Parliament Speaker and chief negotiator Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf signalled that Tehran would not give up its control over the Strait of Hormuz. "Iran, by exercising control over the Strait of Hormuz, will ensure that it and its neighbours enjoy the precious blessing of a future free from the presence and interference of America," he wrote in a social media post.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Strait of Hormuz:** A narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea. It is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint; roughly one-fifth of the world's total oil consumption passes through it daily.
- **Maritime Blockade:** An act of war where a vessel or force prevents passage to or from a specified coast. Unlike a simple sanction, a blockade is a physical enforcement of trade restrictions.
- **Freedom of Navigation (FON):** A principle of international law that, with some exceptions, ships flying the flag of any sovereign state shall not suffer interference from other states. Iran's "new rules" directly challenge this established norm.
- **Nuclear Deterrence & Safeguards:** In this context, "safeguarding" refers to protecting technical infrastructure from kinetic attacks (bombing) and maintaining a "threshold" capability—the ability to produce a weapon quickly if needed.
- **Economic Leverage (Chokepoint Diplomacy):** Using control over a vital geographical feature to extract political concessions. Iran uses the Strait as a counter-lever against U.S. financial sanctions.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The current situation is a high-stakes "maritime battle of wills" centered on three conflicting objectives.
- **The Iranian Thesis:** Tehran argues that regional security is the exclusive prerogative of regional nations. By asserting "new management" over the Strait of Hormuz, Iran aims to dismantle what it calls "exploitative schemes" by foreign powers. They view their nuclear and missile programs not as tools of aggression, but as "national capital" essential for sovereignty.
- **The American Counter-Thesis:** The U.S. position, articulated by President Trump, treats the maritime blockade as a more surgical and effective tool than military strikes. The core goal is "zero enrichment" and a total freeze on missile development. The U.S. is using the blockade of the Gulf of Oman to create an economic "siege" that forces Iran to negotiate from a position of weakness.
- **The Economic Reality:** The divergence between these two views has led to a 7% spike in oil prices (\$126.41/barrel). This highlights the "collateral damage" of the standoff: while the U.S. and Iran engage in a localized struggle, the global economy suffers from energy inflation.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The friction in the Persian Gulf is not a modern anomaly but the result of decades of shifting alliances and broken treaties.
- **The 1953 Coup to the 1979 Revolution:** The relationship shifted from a strategic alliance (under the Shah) to "Great Satan" rhetoric after the Islamic Revolution. The 1980s "Tanker War" during the Iran-Iraq conflict set the precedent for attacking commercial shipping in the Strait.
- **The JCPOA (2015):** The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action briefly offered a diplomatic solution, trading sanctions relief for nuclear limits. The U.S. withdrawal in 2018 collapsed this trust.
- **The 2025 Bombing and 2026 Blockade:** Following the 2025 strikes on nuclear facilities, the conflict moved from the air to the sea. The April 8, 2026 ceasefire stopped the kinetic bombing but replaced it with a "silent war" of blockades and maritime interceptions.

- **Way Forward**

- A balanced solution requires moving beyond binary choices (Blockade vs. Nuclear Weapon).
- **Multilateral Maritime Security:** Instead of U.S.-led or Iran-led management, a neutral UN-monitored task force including major oil importers (India, Japan, China) could ensure freedom of navigation.
- **The "Nuclear for Energy" Swap:** A verifiable mechanism where Iran's nuclear program is strictly limited to medical and energy use, monitored by AI-driven IAEA sensors, in exchange for a guaranteed "Oil Corridor."
- **Regional Dialogue Forum:** Reviving the "Hormuz Peace Endeavor" (HOPE) to include Saudi Arabia and the UAE, ensuring that regional security is not a zero-sum game between Tehran and Washington.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **2017 (GS-II):** "The world has changed from a 'unipolar' to a 'multipolar' one. Discuss the role of India as an emerging power in this context." (Relevant to India's role in the Gulf).
- **2020 (GS-II):** "Critically examine the role of the US in the Middle East and its impact on India."
- **2018 (Prelims):** Questions on the location of the Strait of Hormuz, Persian Gulf, and Gulf of Oman.
- **2019 (GS-III):** "Explain the importance of the maritime security of India's coastline." (Extension of the Gulf security issue).



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# UPSC CSE: Comprehensive Analysis of the Strait of Hormuz & Persian Gulf Geopolitics.



Evolution:  
Iran-Iraq War (1980s Tanker War) → JCPOA (2015)

U.S. Withdrawal (2018)

April 8, 2026  
Ceasefire & Maritime Siege

## UPSC RELEVANCE & WAY FORWARD

RELEVANCE **GS II, III**

- Energy Security & Indian Diaspora (8.5M)
- Strategic Autonomy & International Law (UNCLOS)
- Effect on Indian Interests

## WAY FORWARD

- Multilateral Maritime Security (UN Task Force)
- Verifiable Nuclear Monitoring (IAEA)
- Regional Dialogue (Hormuz Peace Endeavor - HOPE)

## IRAN'S PERSPECTIVE



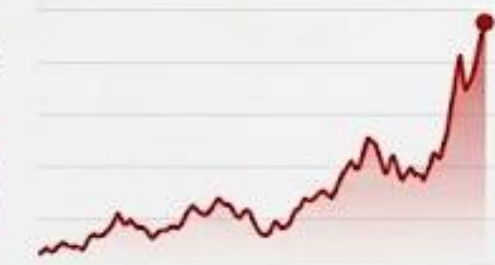
Safeguarding Nuclear & Missile Capabilities as 'National Capital'

- New Rules for Strait Management
- Regional Security via Littoral States
- Dismantling Enemy 'Exploitative Schemes'

## U.S. PERSPECTIVE



- Blockade to Force Nuclear Deal
- Address Core Concerns (Nuclear Issue)
- More Effective than Bombing
- Blocking Iran's Oil Sales (41 Tankers, 69M Barrels)



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# Kerala starts programme to restore sacred groves

**Sarath Babu George**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) has initiated a pilot restoration programme for sacred groves in collaboration with the local Biodiversity Management Committees.

Five sacred groves have been selected from Ezhikkara in Ernakulam, Pattanchery in Palakkad, Villiapally in Kozhikode, Iritty in Kannur, and Uduma in Kasaragod for the initial phase of the project.

## **'Kavu nurseries'**

The major activities under the project include biodiversity assessment of the groves and identification of endangered and invasive species, establishment of 'kavu nurseries' for propagating sacred grove plant species, bio-fencing using



**Green hub:** A sacred grove in Kerala. H. VIBHU

native plants, removal of invasive species and plastic waste, and rejuvenation of ponds in sacred groves. The programme will be funded by the board and the respective local bodies.

Sacred groves (or 'kavus') are culturally protected ecosystems that support rare, endemic and medicinal plant species and help conserve soil and water.

"However, due to developmental pressures and changing socio-cultural practices, many of these groves are declining in extent and ecological health," an official said.

For ecological restoration, over a hundred native and threatened plant species have been identified, and nearly 3,000 saplings will be planted at the selected sites.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Sacred Groves (Kavus):** These are patches of pristine forest traditionally protected by local communities due to religious beliefs or cultural significance. They act as "mini-biosphere reserves."

- *Example:* A small patch of forest in a village dedicated to a local deity where cutting trees is taboo.

- **Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs):** Established under the **Biological Diversity Act, 2002**, these are local bodies at the Panchayat/Municipality level responsible for documenting and preserving local biodiversity.

- **Kavu Nurseries:** Specialized nurseries dedicated to the propagation of rare, endemic, and threatened (RET) plant species naturally found in sacred groves, ensuring that restoration uses native genetic stock rather than commercial varieties.

- **Bio-fencing:** The use of live plants (usually thorny or dense native shrubs) to create a natural barrier. This protects the grove from encroachment and cattle while maintaining ecological continuity.

- **Endemic Species:** Species that are unique to a defined geographic location and found nowhere else in the world. Many Western Ghats species are endemic to these kavus.

- **Invasive Species:** Non-native organisms (like *Lantana camara*) that spread aggressively, choking out local flora and disrupting the ecosystem balance.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of recent restoration efforts is that **ecological health is inextricably linked to community-led conservation**. The initiative argues that sacred groves are not just relics of the past but functional ecological units that require active scientific intervention to survive modern pressures.

- **The Necessity of Restoration:** The primary argument is that "passive protection" (leaving it alone) is no longer enough. Fragmentation and invasive species have degraded the internal resilience of these groves.

- **Decentralized Governance:** By involving BMCs and local bodies, the project argues that conservation is most effective when managed by those who live closest to the resource.

- **Scientific Temper meets Tradition:** The project bridges the gap between traditional reverence and modern science by conducting formal biodiversity assessments and "rejuvenating" traditional water bodies (ponds) within the groves.

- **Economic and Resource Support:** A major point is that while these are "community" spaces, they require state funding to counter the massive "developmental pressures" that incentivize land conversion.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The journey of sacred groves from "sacred spaces" to "legal entities" reflects India's changing environmental consciousness:
- **Pre-Colonial Era:** Sacred groves were the primary mode of conservation. Local customary laws and "taboos" prevented over-exploitation, creating a network of climax vegetation across the subcontinent.
- **Colonial Period:** The British "Scientific Forestry" model viewed forests as timber mines. Many sacred groves were ignored or cleared, as they didn't fit the state-owned forest model.
- **Post-Independence (1950s-1980s):** Rapid urbanization and the "Green Revolution" mindset led to the shrinkage of these groves. Many were converted into temples with concrete structures, destroying the underlying ecology.
- **The Turning Point (2002):** The **Biological Diversity Act** provided a legal framework for local communities to take charge of their biological resources through BMCs.
- **Modern Era (Present):** Recognition of these groves as "**Biodiversity Heritage Sites**" and the realization that they are critical for climate resilience (carbon sinks) and groundwater recharge.

- **Way Forward**

- **Standardization of PBRs:** Ensure every BMC has a high-quality People's Biodiversity Register to prevent "bio-piracy."
- **Eco-Tourism (Regulated):** Small-scale, non-intrusive educational tours could generate revenue for the upkeep of the groves.
- **Academic Collaboration:** Link local colleges with BMCs to conduct long-term monitoring of the 3,000 saplings planted.
- **Legal Protection:** Declare restored groves as "Biodiversity Heritage Sites" under Section 37 of the BD Act to give them a permanent shield against land-use changes.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

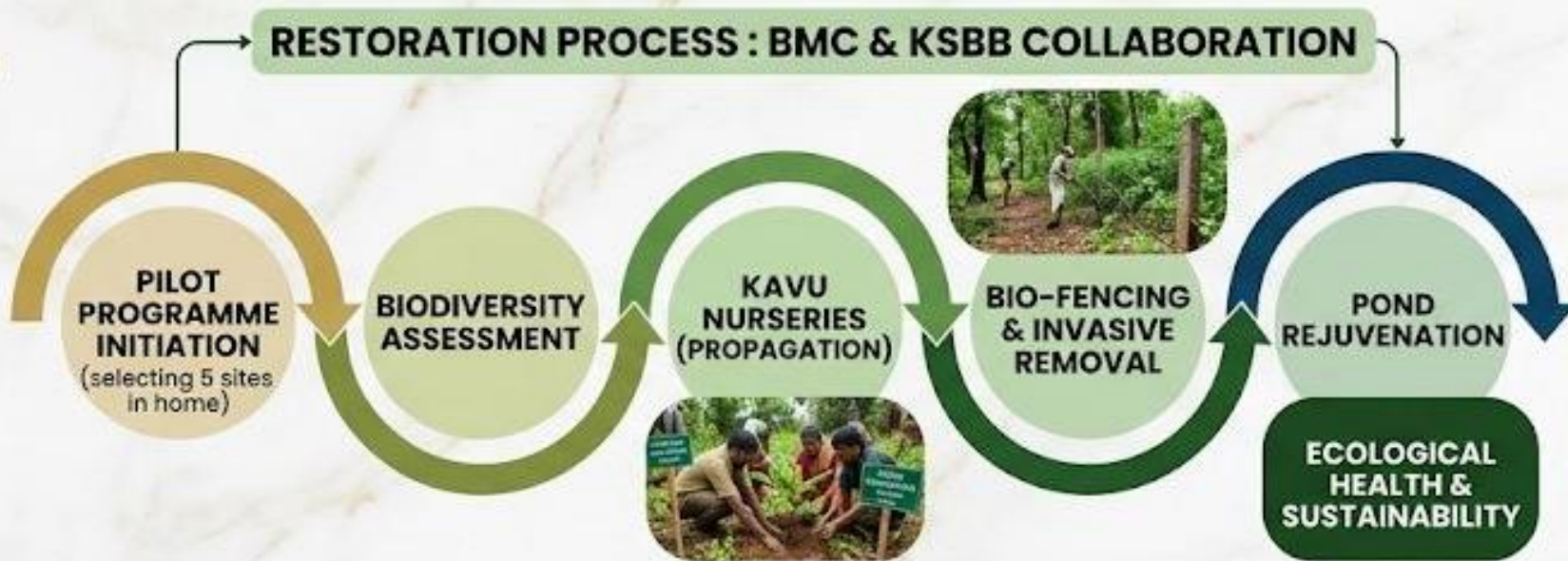
- **Prelims (2011):** Question on the "Biological Diversity Act, 2002" and the role of BMCs.
- **Mains (GS III, 2016):** "Rehabilitation of human settlements is one of the important environmental impacts... Discuss." (Relates to the pressure on land vs. conservation).
- **Mains (GS III, 2019):** "How can the Biodiversity Management Committees help in the conservation of biodiversity? Explain."
- **Mains (GS III, 2023):** Questions on the impact of invasive species on native biodiversity.



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# KERALA SACRED GROVES : A COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION & UPSC ANALYSIS



## KEY FEATURES

- KAVU NURSERIES
- 100+ Native Species
- Bio-fencing
- Bio-fencing

## CHALLENGES

- Problems for organisation
- Biodiversity Assessment
- Problematic breoume & dicrumusal industries

## UPSC RELEVANCE

- GS III: CONSERVATION & BIODIVERSITY, GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY (BMC)
- NCERT Link: Class 12 Biology (In-situ)
- Kunming-Montreal Global Framework

## LOGICAL BASE

- GS III: Insured Conservation & Conservation & plans
- KSBB chain sacred groves sarcciple pond and invasivabair

## WAY FORWARD

- Ecological, Health & sustainably on the on emphedimental anority
- Way forward: dominants tonation, conservation & sustainability



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# Shah to attend first-ever exposition of Buddha's relics on Ladakh visit

**Peerzada Ashiq**  
SRINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who arrived in Leh on Thursday, will attend the first international exposition of holy relics of Lord Buddha in India on the occasion of Buddha Purnima.

Mr. Shah was welcomed by top officials, elected representatives and the local people, with many dressed in traditional attire. "He [Mr. Shah] will be paying respects to the holy relics of Lord Buddha tomorrow [May 1] on the occasion of the 2,569th Buddha Purnima. The Home Minister's visit and his vision for the development of Ladakh shall motivate us to work for fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Ladakh," the Union Territory's Lieutenant-Governor, Vinai Kumar Saxena said.

This is Mr. Shah's first visit since street protests over the demands of Statehood and inclusion in the



Home Minister Amit Shah being welcomed by Ladakh L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena and other dignitaries in Leh on Thursday. ANI

Sixth Schedule left four protesters dead and over 80 injured last September.

The Centre has already announced May 22 as a fresh date to resume Delhi-Ladakh talks on the demands of the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, conglomerates of socio-religious-political groups of the region. The talks hit a roadblock after the protests and the arrest of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was championing the causes of State-

hood and Sixth Schedule.

Meanwhile, five more districts have been created in the region, in an apparent outreach ahead of the talks.

"This visit marks a significant moment for Ladakh, underlining the continued focus and engagement of the Central leadership with the region's development and aspirations," Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, senior BJP leader and former MP from Ladakh said. He said Mr.

Shah arrived in Leh to a rousing and heartfelt welcome from the people of Ladakh.

The holy relics of Tathagata Buddha, which arrived in Leh a few days ago, will be on public display from May 1 to 15 across Leh and Zaskar, offering devotees a rare opportunity for prayers, officials said.

## Letter to L-G

Meanwhile, the LAB and the KDA have written a joint letter to the Lieutenant-Governor and expressed strong objections and key concerns regarding proposed power sector changes in Ladakh.

"We submit this memorandum to express our strong objection and grave concern regarding the proposed formation of a Joint Venture between the Ladakh Power Development Department (49%) and the Rural Electrification Corporation (51%) for the power sector in Ladakh," said the letter.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Sixth Schedule:** Contained within **Article 244** of the Indian Constitution, it provides for the administration of tribal areas through **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)**. These councils have legislative, judicial, and administrative powers over matters like land, forests, and local customs.

- *Example:* Just as parts of Assam and Meghalaya manage local resources through ADCs, Ladakh seeks this to protect its unique cultural and ecological identity.

- **Union Territory (UT) without Legislature:** Unlike Delhi or Puducherry, Ladakh is a UT governed directly by the Center through a Lieutenant-Governor (L-G). It does not have its own elected legislative assembly to pass local laws.

- **Statehood:** The demand to upgrade Ladakh from a UT to a full-fledged State, which would grant it an elected Chief Minister and a local Assembly, ensuring higher political autonomy.

- **Holy Relics (Tathagata Buddha):** Physical remains (often bone fragments or ash) of the Buddha, considered "living" presence in Buddhist tradition. They hold immense "soft power" in India's neighborhood diplomacy.

- **Joint Venture (JV):** A commercial enterprise undertaken jointly by two or more parties. Here, the friction involves the **Ladakh Power Development Department** and the **Rural Electrification Corporation (REC)**, raising concerns about local control over energy resources.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core of the current discourse revolves around the **reconciliation between central administration and local aspirations**. The government emphasizes development and integration, as evidenced by the creation of five new districts to improve administrative reach and the promotion of "Relic Diplomacy" to boost tourism and spiritual ties.

- Conversely, the local populace, represented by the **Leh Apex Body (LAB)** and **Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA)**, argues that the current UT status lacks democratic depth. Their primary thesis is that without Statehood or Sixth Schedule protections, Ladakh's fragile ecology and indigenous culture are vulnerable to outside commercial interests. The recent objection to the power sector Joint Venture exemplifies this; locals fear that a 51% stake held by a central entity (REC) might prioritize national commercial goals over local environmental and economic stability. The arrest of activists like Sonam Wangchuk serves as a flashpoint, highlighting the tension between state security/order and the right to peaceful protest for constitutional safeguards.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The journey of Ladakh is a transition from a frontier kingdom to a contested modern territory:
- **Pre-Independence:** Ladakh was part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under the Dogra dynasty, maintained as a distinct cultural zone.
- **1947–1990s:** Post-accession, Ladakh remained a district of J&K. However, feelings of "step-motherly treatment" by the Srinagar-based administration led to the demand for UT status as early as 1949.
- **1995:** The formation of the **Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC)** for Leh (and later Kargil in 2003) provided some local self-governance but within the J&K framework.
- **August 2019:** The **Abrogation of Article 370** resulted in the reorganization of J&K. Ladakh became a separate UT, fulfilling a long-term demand but ironically stripping away the land and job protections previously held under Article 35A.
- **2020–Present:** The realization that UT status brought direct central rule without a local legislature led to the current protests for Statehood and Sixth Schedule inclusion.

- **Way Forward**

- **Constitutional Safeguards:** Instead of a blanket refusal, the government could explore a "6th Schedule Plus" or "Article 371-style" protection tailored specifically for Ladakh's unique geography.
- **Empowerment of Hill Councils:** Until Statehood is discussed, the existing LAHDCs should be given greater financial autonomy and legislative power over local subjects.
- **Ecological Audit:** Any major power project or Joint Venture must undergo a mandatory, transparent socio-ecological impact assessment involving local stakeholders.
- **Sustained Dialogue:** The proposed May 22 talks must be held in a spirit of compromise, ensuring that leaders of LAB and KDA are treated as partners in nation-building, not agitators.

- **Previous Years' Questions (UPSC)**

- **Mains (2023, GS2):** "The local self-government system in India has not proved to be an effective instrument of governance." (Analyze in the context of Ladakh's Hill Councils).
  - **Mains (2019, GS2):** "The reorganization of the state of Jammu and Kashmir has various implications." (Discuss the administrative and security challenges).
  - **Prelims (2015/2018):** Questions regarding the **Sixth Schedule** and the powers of the **Governor/President** in tribal areas.
-

2019: UT Status (Article 370 Abrogated)

2024: Current Protests & Outreach

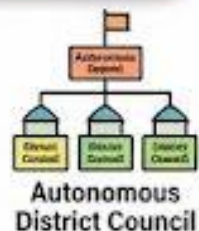


**AXIA**  
IAS ACADEMY



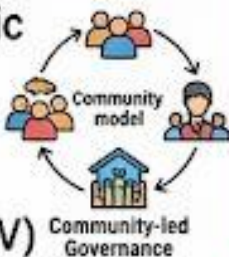
### KEY CONCEPTS AND DEMANDS

- **Sixth Schedule** (Tribal
  - Autonomy, ADC powers))
- **Statehood** (Elected Assembly)
- **Democratic Decentralization**



### STAKEHOLDERS AND CONCERNS

- **Groups:** LAB, KDA, General Public
- **Issues:**
  - Land & Job Security
  - Indigenous Culture
  - Resource Sovereignty (Power JV)



### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION & SOFT POWER

- **Milestones:** Princely J&K
- Leh & Kargil Hill Councils (LAHDC)
- Reorganization Act
- **'Relic Diplomacy'** for building trust



Buddha relics



### MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHALLENGES & WAY FORWARD

- **Dimensions:** Social, Political, Legal, Ecological, Internal Security
- **Proposed Solutions:**
  - Dialogue (resuming talks)
  - Feasible constitutional adaptations (6th Schedule models)
  - Sustainable, local-equity development



# EC set to implement QR code-based access at counting centres

Poll body launches new photo identity cards with QR codes for persons authorised to enter counting halls, including officials and candidates

The Hindu Bureau  
NEW DELHI

**T**he Election Commission on Thursday introduced a QR code-based photo identity card system to eliminate the possibility of any unauthorised persons entering counting centres.

After its introduction during the counting to be held on May 4 for the Assembly elections in Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry and the byelections in seven Assembly constituencies across five States, the system will be extended to all future general and byelections to the Lok Sabha and Legislative Assemblies, the EC said in a statement.

A three-tier security mechanism has been prescribed for verification of identity at counting centres. At the first and second tiers, photo identity cards issued by the Returning Officer (RO) shall be checked manually. At the third and innermost security cordon near the counting hall, entry shall be permitted only after successful verification through QR code scanning.

The new QR code-based



Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar with the two Election Commissioners at the ECINET launch on January 22. [AP](#)

cards will be applicable for categories of persons authorised by EC to enter counting centres and halls, including ROs, Assistant Returning Officers (AROs), counting staff, technical personnel, candidates, election agents and counting agents, among others.

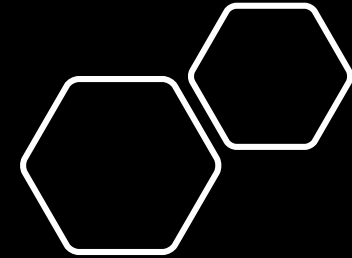
The EC has also introduced a module on the ECINET 2.0 platform for the QR code-based cards.

A media centre will be set up near the counting halls in each centre for the facilitation of authorised presspersons. Entry of presspersons will continue to be permitted on the basis of authority letters issued by the EC in accor-

dance with the existing instructions of the commission.

All Chief Electoral Officers, District Election Officers (DEOs), ROs and AROs have been directed to ensure strict compliance with these instructions to uphold the highest standards of transparency, security and efficiency in the counting process.

The DEOs and ROs have been directed to make all necessary arrangements for the effective implementation of this system, including deployment of trained personnel at designated checkpoints to ensure seamless and secure access control.



- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Election Commission of India (ECI):** A constitutional body established under **Article 324**, responsible for directing and controlling the entire electoral process. Think of it as the "referee" of Indian democracy.
- **Returning Officer (RO):** An officer designated by the ECI for a specific constituency. They are the ultimate authority for conducting elections and declaring results in that area.
- **Three-Tier Security Cordon:** A defensive strategy where security is layered. The first tier is usually at the outer boundary, the second at the building entrance, and the third (the most sensitive) at the door of the counting hall itself.
- **ECINET 2.0:** A dedicated, secure digital ecosystem managed by the ECI to streamline election management, ranging from candidate nominations to the generation of secure identity documents.
- **QR Code (Quick Response Code):** A two-dimensional barcode that stores encrypted data. In this context, it acts as a digital "handshake" to verify that the person holding the card is exactly who they claim to be, preventing manual forgery.

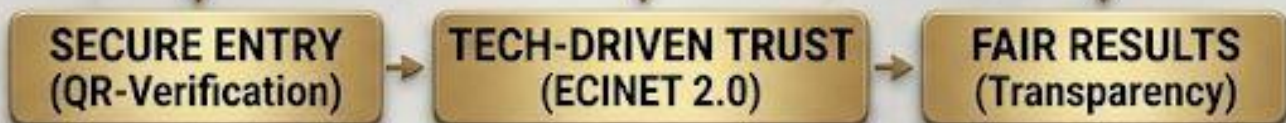
- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of this move is that **technological intervention is no longer optional for maintaining electoral integrity**. As manual identity cards can be forged or duplicated, a digital layer of verification serves as a "fail-safe."
- **Elimination of Unauthorized Entry:** By mandating a QR scan at the third and final tier, the ECI creates a bottleneck that manual oversight might miss. This prevents "impersonation," which is a significant threat during the high-tension environment of counting day.
- **Standardization of Access:** The system applies uniformly to everyone—from high-ranking ROs to technical staff and political agents. This "blind" technological gatekeeping removes human bias or intimidation at the entrance.
- **Scalability as a Proof of Concept:** By starting with specific Assembly elections (like West Bengal and Kerala) and byelections, the ECI is using these as a laboratory to refine the tech before a full-scale Lok Sabha rollout.
- **Transparency vs. Efficiency:** While the extra layer of scanning might seem like a delay, it actually increases efficiency by reducing the time security personnel spend squinting at photos and manual signatures.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**
- The journey of Indian elections is a story of moving from "paper and muscle" to "tech and transparency."
- **Pre-Independence to 1950s:** Voting was rudimentary. The "Ballot Box" system was the standard, and security was purely physical, often prone to booth capturing in later decades.
- **1990s (The Seshan Era):** Former CEC T.N. Seshan introduced **Voter ID cards (EPICs)**. This was the first major step in tying a person's identity to their right to be in a polling or counting station.
- **2000s (The EVM Revolution):** The shift from paper ballots to Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) changed the counting hall's nature. It moved from a place of physical paper-shuffling to a high-tech zone.
- **2010s (VVPAT and Digitization):** The introduction of Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails (VVPAT) added a layer of physical verification to electronic results.
- **Present Day (Biometric and QR Integration):** We are now in the "Cyber-Physical" stage, where the physical presence of a person is validated by a digital "twin" stored in the ECINET database.
  
- **Way Forward**
- **Redundancy Protocols:** Ensure every QR card has a secondary holographic watermark for manual verification if the tech fails.
- **Mock Drills:** Conduct "Dry Runs" with party agents before counting day to familiarize them with the scanning process.
- **End-to-End Encryption:** Ensure that the data transmitted from the scanner to the ECINET server is encrypted to prevent "man-in-the-middle" cyberattacks.
- **Public Awareness:** Release short videos explaining the security measures to the public to prevent rumors of "malpractice" on counting day.
  
- **All Previous Years' Questions**
- **UPSC 2017 (GS-2):** "In the light of recent controversy regarding the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVM), what are the challenges before the Election Commission of India to ensure the trustworthiness of elections in India?"
- **UPSC 2020 (GS-2):** "The jurisdiction of the Election Commission of India has been decided by the Constitution. Discuss the role of the ECI in the light of the evolution of the Model Code of Conduct."
- **APSC 2022 (GS-2):** "Discuss the role of technology in ensuring free and fair elections in India with special reference to the Election Commission's recent initiatives."



**THE PILLARS OF ELECTORAL SANCTITY**

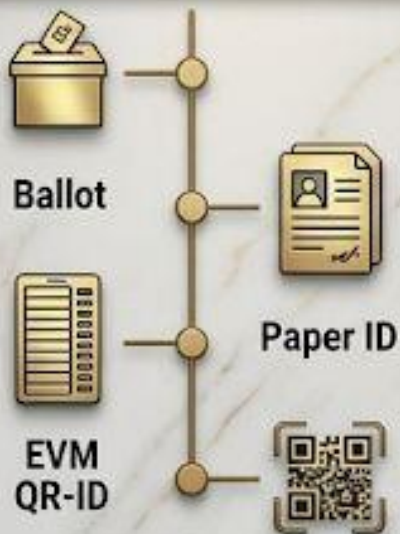


3-Tier security & QR Validation – Elimination of unauthorized entry

Scalable Digital Public Infrastructure – trust through verification

Ensuring Procedural Justice & Standardization of access

**HISTORICAL EVOLUTION**



**UPSC SYLLABUS LINKAGES**

- GS Paper 1; GS Execution
- GS Paper 2, GS Interpretations
- GS Paper 3: Grons
- Ethics – Ethics

**ECI**

- Key points of government
- Government ECI buildings
- Developmental evamions and soctoral buildings



**CHALLENGES**

- technical literacy
- Cybersecurity
- physical bottlenecks

**SUSTAINABILITY**

- resource viability
- legal standing
- societal acceptance

**WAY FORWARD**

- Redundancy protocols
- Mock Drills
- Public Awareness

# Lift abortion time limit for minor rape survivors: SC

SC says state and doctors cannot make decisions for minor rape survivors, it should be left to the parents or survivors. CJI calls for amendment to ensure such cases are completed within a week

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Union government to amend the abortion law to remove the time limit on medical termination of unwanted pregnancies in the case of minor rape victims.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi made the observation while refusing to entertain a curative petition filed by the government against a recent decision of the top court allowing a 15-year-old rape survivor to terminate a 30-week pregnancy.

Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, accompanied by specialists from AIIMS, said they were against the termination considering the health and well-being of both the teenager and the "unborn child". One of the specialist doctors said the court was wrong to consider this as a foetus-child (rape survivor) issue.

"This is a child-child issue," the doctor submitted in court.

The court said it was not for the doctors or the state



**CJI Kant says the child's victimisation cannot remain with her for the rest of her life as a scar**

to choose what was best for the rape survivor. The decision should be left to the parents of the survivor and the survivor herself.

"Let not medical personnel become the masters of the will of the people. The people would decide," Justice Bagchi said.

The state and the doctors could take them through the medical procedure and provide them expert help in the form of counsellors, the court said.

"You will help parents

and children by having an informed discussion on the medical procedure for ending the foetuses' life and consequences... If anyone can come back to us for a review of our decision in this case, it is the parents or the child... The state cannot file a review. It has no locus standi. It is not for AIIMS to choose, it is for citizens to choose and the AIIMS to medically implement their choice," Justice Bagchi told the Centre and the AIIMS doctors.

**Severe trauma**

Chief Justice Kant said the 15-year-old had already undergone the trauma of rape. She cannot be compelled to carry and give birth to a child. Her victimisation cannot remain with her for the rest of her life as a permanent scar.

misation cannot remain with her for the rest of her life as a permanent scar.

"We are only protecting the child whose face is staring back at us. If she questions us, what answer would we give? What answer would the society have? The law cannot bow to momentary sentiments. The law has to see the whole life ahead for the victim. If law is required to be ruthless, it has to be that," the Chief Justice addressed the law officer and the doctors.

Ms. Bhati said the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Amendment Act of 2021 has increased the time limit for legal abortion from 20 to 24 weeks for survivors of rape, minors, and women with disabilities.

"You should amend the law to remove any time limit on medical termination of unwanted pregnancy caused by the rape of a minor. You should also bring an amendment not only in the MTP Act, but also in the penal law, making it mandatory to complete the trial in such cases in a week. The entire property of the accused should be given to the victim," Chief Justice Kant observed.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act:** Originally enacted in 1971 and amended in 2021, this is the primary legislation governing legal abortions in India. It sets the "gestational limits"—the timeframe within which a woman can legally end a pregnancy.
- **Curative Petition:** This is the last legal resort available to a litigant after a review petition has been dismissed. It was evolved by the Supreme Court in the *Rupa Ashok Hurra vs. Ashok Hurra* (2002) case to prevent abuse of the process and a gross miscarriage of justice.
- **Locus Standi:** A Latin term meaning "right to appear." It refers to the ability of a party to demonstrate to the court a sufficient connection to and harm from the law or action challenged. Here, the court questioned the government's *locus standi* to challenge a victim's personal choice.
- **Gestational Limit:** The age of the pregnancy, usually measured in weeks. Currently, the law allows up to 24 weeks for specific categories (like rape survivors), but beyond that, it usually requires a medical board's intervention regarding fetal abnormalities.
- **Child-Child Issue:** A sensitive medical and ethical perspective where both the pregnant individual (a minor) and the unborn fetus are legally and biologically considered "children," complicating the decision-making process for doctors.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The dialogue in the courtroom pits "state paternalism" against "individual autonomy."
- **The Government & AIIMS' Stance:** The central argument for the state was rooted in the "right to life" of the unborn child and the physical safety of the minor. By labeling it a "child-child issue," they argued that the state has an obligation to protect both lives. They feared that a 30-week termination is essentially a premature delivery, which carries significant health risks for the young mother.
- **The Court's Counter-Argument:** The Bench emphasized that the survivor's trauma is paramount. They argued that the state cannot force a girl to carry a "permanent scar" of her victimization.
- **The Thesis of Agency:** The core of the judgment lies in the declaration that neither the state nor medical professionals are "masters of the will." The decision-making power must reside with the survivor and her guardians.
- **Reformist Proposals:** Beyond the specific case, the Court proposed radical systemic changes: removing time limits for minor rape survivors, fast-tracking trials to a one-week duration, and the total forfeiture of the accused's property to the victim.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The trajectory of abortion laws in India reflects a shift from population control and medical necessity to a rights-based approach.

- **Pre-1971:** Abortion was criminalized under Section 312 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) unless it was performed to save the mother's life.

- **MTP Act, 1971:** Following the Shantilal Shah Committee report, the law was liberalized to allow abortions up to 20 weeks under specific conditions (health risks, rape, contraceptive failure).

- **Judicial Activism (2010s):** Various High Courts and the Supreme Court began allowing terminations beyond 20 weeks on a case-by-case basis, citing the "Right to Life" under Article 21.

- **MTP Amendment Act, 2021:** The limit was officially raised to 24 weeks for vulnerable categories, and the "contraceptive failure" clause was extended to unmarried women.

- **Present Day:** The judiciary is now pushing for the complete removal of time limits for minors, moving toward a "total autonomy" model for rape survivors.

- **Way Forward**

- **Legislative Amendment:** Parliament should act on the Court's suggestion to amend the MTP Act, specifically creating a "no-limit" window for minor rape survivors.

- **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Clear guidelines for medical boards to ensure that "medical opinion" doesn't turn into "moral policing."

- **Holistic Support:** Reproductive rights shouldn't end at termination; the state must provide long-term psychological and financial rehabilitation.

- **All Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Mains 2023 (GS II):** "Discuss the contribution of the Supreme Court of India in the expansion of the scope of Fundamental Rights."

- **Mains 2019 (GS II):** "Explore and evaluate the impact of the Right to Information Act on the governance of India." (Relates to "Informed Discussion" mentioned in the article).

- **Prelims 2022:** Question regarding the MTP Amendment Act provisions.



## THE SUPREME COURT'S JUDICIAL REVOLUTION IN REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS



### STATE'S ARGUMENT



- State's right to life of unborn child
- Minors must be protected from late-term procedures
- Unequity 'agborn to saving
- Inferred to from and new reneciem



### COURT'S RESPONSE



- Bodily Autonomy and Dignity
- Survivor's and Family's Choice over State

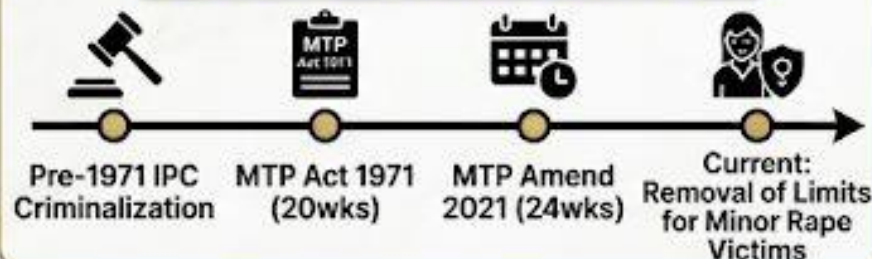
Trauma



Empowerment

## JUDICIAL REACTION TO MTP ACT

### HISTORICAL EVOLUTION



### NEW SYSTEMIC PROPOSALS



### MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACT & WAY FORWARD



**Social**

- Key's right to life of unborn child
- Political dimensions



**Legal**

- Key-amened denner of Ethical
- Connected Ethical



**Ethical**

- Key-remonal to true Patriotism
- Key joint and economic

Summary is comindent requariered msonocative camarisation that mnoas and for user over ithical interontortied political summary.



# India's first green methanol plant to turn Kutch's most invasive weed into marine fuel

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

A plant that has been ranked as one of the "top 100 invasive species in the world" and has for decades threatened biodiversity in Kutch's Banni grasslands, may soon be harnessed for the production of green methanol and fuel for ocean-going ships.

The Mexican-origin shrub called *Prosopis juliflora*, known as *Gando Bavai* in the region, *Vilayati Keekar* in North India and *Seemai Karuvelam* in Tamil, has crowded out native grasses over thousands of kilometres in Kutch. The plant was first introduced by the British in the 1920s to 'green' Delhi and by the Gujarat Forest Department in 1961 to halt the encroaching salt desert in the Rann. This weed is to become the feedstock for In-



*Prosopis juliflora* has crowded out native grasses over thousands of kilometres in Kutch. FILE PHOTO

dia's first green methanol production plant.

Methanol is used as a fuel in shipping often as a replacement to what is called 'bunker oil'. Conventional methanol is produced from fossil fuels such as gas or coal gasification. Green methanol uses biomass from agricultural residue as source material as in the case with the *juli-*

*flora*.

The project, sited at the Deendayal Port Authority (DPA) in Kandla, will produce five tonnes of methanol a day and is being built by Pune-based Thermax Energy with gasification technology from Vadodara's Ankur Scientific, and will be owned by the port authority. Both companies are betting that the Go-

vernment of India's policy to convert ports along the western coast into "green ports" will create demand for a fuel that the global shipping industry is being obliged to adopt under International Maritime Organization (IMO) rules.

## Greenhouse gas cuts

Methanol made from renewable feedstocks can cut a vessel's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 95% and NO<sub>x</sub> (nitrogen oxides) by up to 80%, according to the Methanol Institute, while eliminating sulphur oxides and particulate matter.

Ankur Jain, who heads Ankur Scientific, said his company's role lies in the first stage of a two-step process. "The starting point for most fuels and chemicals is going to be syngas because syngas typically has hydrogen, CO and CO<sub>2</sub>," he told *The Hin-*

*du*. Gasification, he explained, sits between combustion and pyrolysis. "You are heating it in the absence of oxygen, taking it out, improving its quality, burning them a bit and then breaking them down into hydrogen and CO (carbon monoxide) or syngas," he said. Thermax will handle the second step, converting that syngas into methanol.

"It [*juliflora*] is one of the best feedstocks because it is hardwood, dense, has a good energy profile, and low in acids," Mr Jain said, adding Gujarat already wants the species cleared. The plant will be certified to run on other agricultural residues such as bagasse and cotton stalk, which Mr. Jain estimates could, at their maximum potential, displace up to a third of India's oil imports.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**
- **Prosopis juliflora (Gando Baval):** An invasive, xerophytic (drought-resistant) shrub native to South and Central America. In Gujarat, it is called "Gando Baval" (Crazy Thorn) because of its uncontrolled, aggressive growth that chokes local ecosystems.
- **Green Methanol:** Unlike conventional methanol derived from natural gas or coal, green methanol is produced from renewable sources like biomass (agricultural waste, wood) or captured CO<sub>2</sub> and green hydrogen. It is considered "carbon-neutral" because the CO<sub>2</sub> released during combustion was previously absorbed by the plant matter.
- **Syngas (Synthesis Gas):** A fuel gas mixture consisting primarily of hydrogen (H<sub>2</sub>), carbon monoxide (CO), and some CO<sub>2</sub>. It is the crucial intermediate "building block" in creating synthetic fuels.
- **Gasification vs. Pyrolysis:** Gasification involves heating biomass with a controlled amount of oxygen/steam to produce syngas. Pyrolysis is the thermal decomposition of organic material in the *complete absence* of oxygen, usually resulting in bio-oil and char.
- **Bunker Oil:** A heavy, residual fuel oil used by ships. It is notorious for high sulfur content and heavy pollutant emissions, which the shipping industry is now trying to phase out.
- **IMO (International Maritime Organization):** The UN specialized agency responsible for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution. Their "Green Voyage 2050" project aims to slash the industry's carbon footprint.
- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**
- The core thesis revolves around a **Circular Economy** model: turning an environmental liability (invasive species) into a high-value industrial asset (clean fuel).
- **The Problem as the Solution:** *Prosopis juliflora* has decimated the Banni grasslands, India's largest natural grassland, destroying the livelihoods of the Maldhari pastoralists. By using it as feedstock, the project achieves two goals: ecological restoration and renewable energy production.
- **The Shipping Pivot:** The global shipping industry is under immense pressure to decarbonize. Methanol is emerging as a frontrunner because it is liquid at ambient temperatures (unlike hydrogen or LNG), making it easier to store and handle on existing vessels.
- **Emission Reductions:** The transition to green methanol isn't just a minor tweak; it represents a seismic shift in maritime pollution, potentially cutting CO<sub>2</sub> by up to 95% and virtually eliminating sulfur oxides (SOx).
- **Scalability and Self-Reliance:** By leveraging other residues like bagasse and cotton stalks, proponents argue that India can significantly reduce its heavy dependence on crude oil imports, bolstering energy security.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The journey of *Prosopis juliflora* in India is a classic tale of "unintended consequences" in ecological management:
- **1920s (The British Era):** Introduced to Delhi to provide green cover and fuel wood for the new capital. At the time, its ability to grow in poor soil was seen as a miracle.
- **1961 (Post-Independence Strategy):** The Gujarat Forest Department aerial-seeded the Rann of Kutch to create a biological barrier against the advancing salt desert. The intent was soil stabilization and "greening" the arid landscape.
- **Late 20th Century (The Invasion):** The plant escaped its intended boundaries. Its deep taproots (reaching up to 50 meters) depleted groundwater, and its allelopathic properties (chemicals that inhibit other plants) killed native grasses.
- **21st Century (The Green Shift):** After decades of failed attempts to eradicate the weed, the focus shifted from "elimination" to "utilization." The 2020s saw the convergence of India's Green Hydrogen Mission and IMO's decarbonization targets, leading to the current Deendayal Port Authority project.

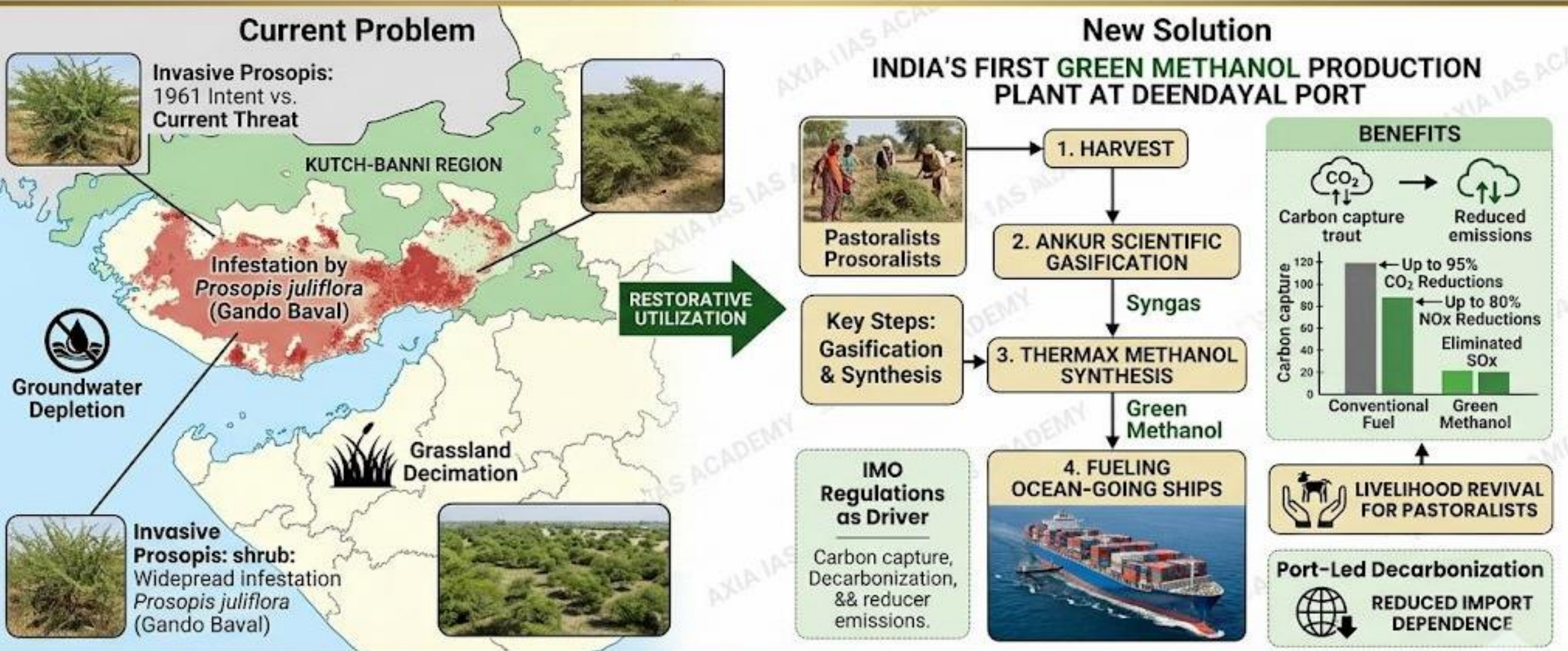
- **Way Forward**

- To ensure the success of this "Green Port" initiative, the following steps are vital:
- **Community Partnerships:** Formalize the role of local pastoralists in the harvesting process to ensure equitable wealth distribution.
- **R&D Investment:** Optimize the gasification process to handle various types of biomass moisture levels.
- **Policy Incentives:** Provide "Carbon Credits" to the DPA and the technology partners to offset initial high capital costs.
- **Ecological Monitoring:** Use satellite mapping to track the removal of *juliflora* and ensure that native grasses are actually returning.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Prelims (2018):** Question regarding why *Prosopis juliflora* is often mentioned in the news (Answer: It tends to reduce the biodiversity in the area).
- **Mains (GS3, 2022):** "Discuss the main objectives of the National Biofuel Policy."
- **Mains (GS3, 2021):** "Describe the benefits of deriving electric energy from sunlight in contrast to conventional energy generation." (Parallel theme: Renewable vs. Fossil).
- **Mains (GS3, 2020):** "What are the key features of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)?" (Parallel theme: Emissions).

# AXIA IAS ACADEMY PREP: WEED TO GREEN FUEL - THE BANNI CONVERSION.



# How is the next UN chief being chosen?

Why is the role of Secretary-General important? Who are the candidates? What factors shape the choice? Why does this election matter now? What are the candidates' campaign priorities? What happens next?

## EXPLAINER

Raja Karthikeya

### The story so far

**T**he election of the next UN Secretary-General is underway. On April 21-22, four candidates – two women and two men – pitched their records of public service and leadership to the UN General Assembly in “informal, interactive dialogues”.

### Why is the role of Secretary-General important?

The UN Charter defines the Secretary-General as the UN's Chief Administrative Officer, who oversees the work of the UN Secretariat and fulfils “any other functions and duties entrusted” to them by the organisation's principal organs, including the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General also has the mandate to bring to the Security Council's attention any issue that threatens global peace and security.

Where needed, the Secretary-General has the authority to appoint “Personal Envoys” (as Antonio Guterres has now done for the current West Asia conflict).

Often described as the world's “chief diplomat,” the Secretary-General is the face and voice of the UN, speaking as the world's conscience on issues ranging from the arms race in space and climate change to persistent inequality that hampers economic growth.

### How is the Secretary-General elected?

The UN Charter states that the Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council. This means that the Permanent Members of the Security Council – China, France, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S. – have a significant say in who gets elected.

### What considerations play a role?

While the term of a Secretary-General is



Often described as the world's “chief diplomat,” the Secretary-General is the voice of the UN. [@UN/UNIS](#)

technically “discretionary,” incumbents have, since 1981, voluntarily limited themselves to two terms. By custom, the post rotates among five regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. This is the turn of the latter. Within the region, there are dynamics at play, with Spanish-speaking Latin American countries and English-speaking Caribbean nations supporting different candidates.

### Who are the candidates?

The four candidates now officially in the race are: Michelle Bachelet, former President of Chile and former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; Macky Sall, former President of Senegal; Rafael Grossi, Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency; and Rebecca Grynszpan, Head of the UN Conference on Trade and Development.

### Why is this election crucial?

Eighty years after its founding, the UN is facing a deep financial and political crisis. The Secretariat relies on mandatory “assessed contributions” collected from member states. Still, non-payment, partial payment, and delay in payment of dues by

leading contributors have triggered an unprecedented financial situation.

The Security Council is paralysed by acrimony and persistent vetoes by the permanent members. The UN is also struggling to mobilise funds and troops for missions in places such as Haiti, and with host country relations in cases such as in Mali, where the UN mission was forced to withdraw.

Over the past decade, the UN played a key role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing climate action through the Paris Agreement, and promoting sustainable development via the 2030 Agenda. However, recent conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan, Ukraine, and Iran have raised questions about its ability to prevent war – a central idea of the UN Charter. There are increasing calls for the UN to “return to basics” by focusing more on conflict resolution. The Sustainable Development Goals are now universal markers of developmental progress but there is rising concern that only 18% of the targets are on track to be met by 2030. Meanwhile, the humanitarian system is under severe strain due to multiple conflicts, intensifying disasters, and pressures on international humanitarian law. The next

Secretary-General will have the unenviable task of not just administering, but rejuvenating the organisation.

### What are the candidates' campaign priorities?

During their interactions with the General Assembly, Ms. Bachelet, Ms. Grynszpan, and Mr. Sall all emphasised preventive diplomacy – the UN term for preventing conflicts through adroit behind-the-scenes parley with the stakeholders to the conflict. However, their approaches differ. Ms. Bachelet prioritised field presence, while Ms. Grynszpan focused on merging the UN's work in the prevention of conflict with its work on human rights. Ms. Grynszpan was arguably the most vocal on UN reform, proposing restructuring the Secretary-General's office within the first 100 days if elected. Among areas for priority action, Ms. Bachelet highlighted climate, Mr. Sall highlighted migration, and Mr. Grossi highlighted UN-World Bank relations. Ms. Grynszpan stressed the need to protect least-developed nations from funding cuts.

All candidates committed to gender parity, while Ms. Bachelet emphasised improving geographic diversity within the UN workforce, a longstanding demand of developing countries. On the stasis in the Security Council, Ms. Grynszpan and Mr. Sall said they would publicly call out permanent members of the council who violate international law, while Mr. Grossi promised to uphold the UN Charter. Ms. Bachelet said she will use the Secretary-General's office to build political viability for Security Council reform.

### What happens next?

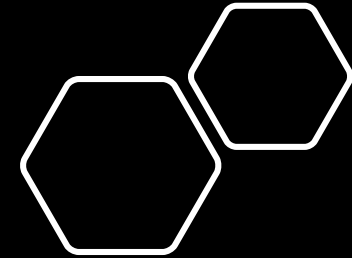
In the next phase, the Security Council will hold closed-door deliberations and straw polls before recommending a candidate to the General Assembly around October. Once the latter confirms the choice through a simple majority vote, the new Secretary-General will take office on January 1, 2027.

(Raja Karthikeya is a former international civil servant)

## THE GIST

▼ The UN is facing a deep financial and political crisis, with Security Council paralysis, funding shortfalls, and rising global conflicts.

▼ The next Secretary-General will have the task of rejuvenating the organisation, focusing on conflict prevention, reform, and advancing sustainable development goals.

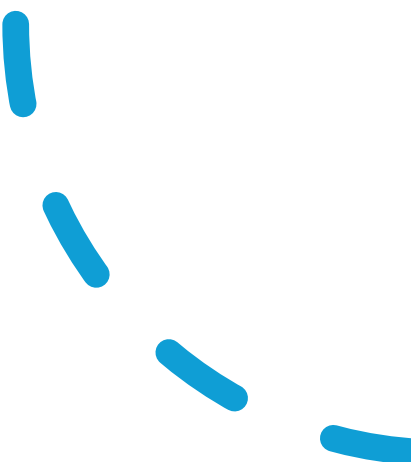




- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **UN Secretariat:** The executive arm of the UN, responsible for day-to-day operations. It is headed by the Secretary-General and staffed by international civil servants.
- **Assessed Contributions:** The mandatory dues that UN member states pay to the organization's regular budget. The amount is determined based on a country's economic capacity (GNP).
- **Security Council Veto:** A power held by the five permanent members (P5) to block any substantive resolution. This power often leads to "Council Stasis" during geopolitical conflicts.
- **Preventive Diplomacy:** Diplomatic action taken to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts, and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** A set of 17 global goals adopted in 2015 to be achieved by 2030, covering poverty, inequality, climate change, and justice.
- **Gender Parity:** A state of equal ease of access to resources and opportunities regardless of gender, including economic participation and decision-making.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The core thesis of the current discourse is that the UN is at a **structural and existential crossroads**. The Secretary-General's role has shifted from a "Chief Administrator" to a "Global Conscience" who must navigate a polarized Security Council.
  - **Key Points:**
    - **Financial Fragility:** The UN is facing a liquidity crisis due to non-payment of dues, forcing budget cuts and personnel reductions.
    - **Political Paralysis:** The P5's use of the veto has rendered the Security Council ineffective in modern conflicts (Ukraine, Gaza).
    - **The Development Gap:** Only 18% of SDG targets are on track, threatening the UN's credibility as a vehicle for global development.
    - **Regional Rotation:** The informal rule of rotating the post among regions is currently favoring Latin America and the Caribbean, though external candidates (like Macky Sall from Africa) highlight the competitive nature of the post.
- 



- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The office of the UNSG has evolved significantly since 1945:

- **The Early Years (1945–1960s):** Figures like Trygve Lie and Dag Hammarskjöld defined the office. Hammarskjöld, in particular, expanded the "political" powers of the SG, introducing the concept of "preventive diplomacy."

- **Cold War Era:** The SG often acted as a bridge between the US and the USSR. The "Regional Rotation" custom took hold to ensure no single bloc dominated the Secretariat.

- **Post-Cold War Optimism (1990s):** Under Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan, the UN expanded peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions (e.g., "Agenda for Peace").

- **The Modern Era (2010s–Present):** Shift toward global crises like Climate Change and Pandemics. However, rising nationalism has led to the current "funding-for-influence" crisis.

- **Way Forward**

- **Security Council Reform:** Expanding permanent and non-permanent seats to include regional powers like India, Brazil, and African nations.

- **Financial Independence:** Penalizing late payments and creating a "Stability Fund" for the Secretariat.

- **Strengthening Article 99:** Making it mandatory for the Security Council to hold a public debate when the SG invokes this article.

- **A Woman SG:** After 80 years and nine male SGs, electing a woman (Bachelet or Grynspan) would provide a significant symbolic and leadership shift.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

- **Mains 2022 (GS-2):** "The sphere of 'Global Governance' is undergoing a shift. In this context, discuss the role of the UN in the 21st century."


- **Mains 2015 (GS-2):** "Discuss the impediments India is facing in its pursuit of a permanent seat in the UN Security Council."

- **Prelims 2023:** Question regarding the "New Collective Quantified Goal" (Climate Finance) which involves UN agencies.


# UPSC CSE ANALYSIS: NEXT UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ELECTION



## CANDIDATES & PRIORITIES

 **Preventive Diplomacy** (field presence, human rights focus)

 **Climate Action & Migration**

 **UN-World Bank Relations**

 **Gender Parity Commitment**



**Syllabus Links (GS-II)**



**Syllabus (GS-IV)**



## THE CHALLENGES

- Deep Financial & Political Crisis
- Paralyzed Security Council (Veto power stasis)
- Funds/Troops mobilization issues 
- Global War prevention capabilities (Gaza, Sudan, Ukraine)
- Rejuvenating the Organization



## UN SECRETARY-GENERAL ROLE & IMPORTANCE

-  **UN's Chief Administrative Officer** (UN Secretariat)
-  **Mandate on peace and security** (Security Council attention)
-  **'Chief Diplomat' speaking as world's conscience** (climate, inequality)



## ELECTION PROCESS & CONSIDERATIONS

- Appointed by General Assembly on Security Council recommendation (P5 influence)
- Two-term limit custom
- Regional Rotation custom (This turn: Latin America & Caribbean) 

## UPSC RELEVANCE

Analysis → Knowledge → Success

A must-know for GS Papers II (International Relations), IV (Ethics), Essays, and PSIR/Sociology Optionals. Key to understanding global governance shifts, multilateral challenges, and norm entrepreneurship.

# What happened to Komagata Maru passengers in 1914?

Why was the Komagata Maru denied entry into Canada? What happened to the passengers?

Prathmesh Kher

## The story so far:

In the spring of 1914, a Japanese steamship called the Komagata Maru sailed from Hong Kong toward Vancouver, British Columbia, carrying 376 passengers: 340 Sikhs, 24 Muslims, and 12 Hindus from Punjab in British India. They were British subjects hoping to build new lives in Canada. What awaited them was a two-month standoff in the harbour, a brutal denouement on the docks of Calcutta, and a place in the history of both India's anti-colonial movement and Canada's long reckoning with its own past. The episode was recently mentioned by singer Diljit Dosanjh on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*.

## Why was Punjab central to events leading up to the voyage?

By 1914, Punjab had become the primary recruiting ground for the British Indian Army. The British had cultivated Punjab

as a loyal province populated by a "martial race," but the relationship was both lopsided and extractive. Rapid agricultural growth combined with easy credit had created a crisis of rural indebtedness, and epidemics of malaria and plague in the early 1900s pushed families toward emigration as the only way out.

Among those who left were the founders of the Ghadar movement, established in 1913 among expatriate Punjabis on the U.S. West Coast, dedicated to the armed overthrow of British rule in India.

The Komagata Maru voyage was freighted with this politics from the start. Ghadar activists boarded the ship in Yokohama, delivering lectures and distributing anti-colonial literature, and British intelligence was watching closely.

## What led to the standoff?

The voyage was organised by Gurdit Singh, a Punjabi entrepreneur based in Singapore, who chartered the ship

specifically to challenge Canada's exclusionary laws. Canada had enacted a "continuous journey regulation" in 1908, barring entry to anyone who had not travelled by a single unbroken journey from their country of birth, while also pressuring shipping companies not to sell direct tickets from India.

When the ship arrived at Vancouver's Burrard Inlet on May 23, 1914, immigration officials refused to let it dock. Prime Minister Robert Borden kept the ship anchored offshore, cutting off communication and stalling proceedings. The local South Asian community raised over \$20,000 to take over the ship's charter and hired a lawyer to bring a test case, but the British Columbia Court of Appeal unanimously upheld the discriminatory laws. Officials then withheld food and water. On July 19, an armed police force of 150 men attempted to board the ship; the passengers fought them off. Borden dispatched a naval cruiser. Only 22 passengers, mostly those who could prove prior Canadian

residence, were ultimately permitted to disembark. The ship departed under escort on July 23. British colonial authorities, suspicious of the passengers' politics, refused to let the ship dock in Hong Kong or Singapore. When it finally anchored near Calcutta in late September, police tried to force the exhausted passengers onto trains bound for Punjab. They refused, marched toward the city, and were fired upon. Twenty passengers were killed; many more were imprisoned. Gurdit Singh evaded capture for years before surrendering in 1920 and serving five years in prison.

## What happened when the ship returned to India?

In the aftermath, the Ghadar movement surged in recruitment. Some members returned to Punjab in 1915 to attempt an armed uprising, which failed due to informers and mass arrests. Dozens were sent to the gallows. But the movement's martyrs became folklore.

Canada was slow to acknowledge what it had done. An apology delivered at a community festival by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 was rejected by many as insufficient. It took until 2016 for Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to deliver a formal apology on the floor of the House of Commons. The Komagata Maru remains a sharp demonstration of what colonial subjects had long understood: that the British Empire's promises of equal subjecthood were never meant for everyone.

## THE GIST

The Komagata Maru carried 376 British subjects from Punjab but was denied entry into Canada under the "continuous journey" regulation, leading to a two-month standoff in Vancouver harbour.

On returning to India, the passengers faced police firing near Calcutta, killing 20 people.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Continuous Journey Regulation (1908):** A discriminatory Canadian law requiring immigrants to travel via a non-stop voyage from their country of birth. Since no direct steamship line existed between India and Canada at the time, it was a "shadow ban" specifically targeting Indians.
- **Martial Race Theory:** A pseudo-scientific British ideology claiming certain ethnic groups (like Punjabis, Sikhs, and Gurkhas) were inherently more "warlike" and loyal. This was used to justify heavy recruitment in Punjab while excluding others.
- **Ghadar Movement:** Derived from the Arabic word for "rebellion," this was an international revolutionary movement founded in 1913 by expatriate Indians in North America (notably Lala Hardayal) to overthrow British rule through armed struggle.
- **Rural Indebtedness:** A socio-economic condition where farmers are trapped in a cycle of debt due to high land revenue, volatile markets, and usurious moneylenders—a primary "push factor" for Punjabi emigration.
- **Exclusionary Laws:** Legal frameworks designed to maintain a "White Canada" or "White Australia" by preventing non-European migration through literacy tests or financial requirements.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The article presents a narrative that challenges the idea of the British Empire as a benevolent or unified entity.
- **The Myth of Equal Subjecthood:** The core thesis is that while Indians were technically "British subjects," they did not enjoy the "Rights of Englishmen." The incident exposed the racial hierarchy inherent in colonial citizenship.
- **Punjab as an Extractive Frontier:** The article argues that Punjab's loyalty was rewarded with economic hardship. The British used the province for soldiers but failed to protect its peasantry from debt and disease, forcing them to seek lives elsewhere.
- **State-Sponsored Exclusion:** The standoff in Vancouver wasn't just a local issue; it was a high-level political move. Prime Minister Robert Borden's government used administrative delays, starvation tactics, and naval intimidation to break the will of the passengers.
- **The Radicalization of the Diaspora:** A key sub-argument is that the brutality of the Canadian and British governments served as the ultimate catalyst for the Ghadarites. It turned peaceful immigrants into revolutionary martyrs.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The Komagata Maru is not an isolated event but a link in a long chain of colonial and post-colonial history:
- **Pre-1914 (The Push):** Economic distress in Punjab and the rise of the "White Canada" policy.
- **May–July 1914 (The Standoff):** The ship remains anchored in Burrard Inlet; the "Shore Committee" of local South Asians fights a losing legal battle.
- **September 1914 (Budge Budge Riot):** Upon returning to India, the passengers are treated as criminals. A riot at Budge Budge (Calcutta) leads to the death of 20 passengers by British fire.
- **1915 (Ghadar Conspiracy):** Inspired by the incident, Ghadarites attempt an uprising in India during WWI, leading to the Lahore Conspiracy Case trials.
- **Post-Independence (Recognition):** For decades, the event was a footnote. It gained prominence as the South Asian diaspora in Canada grew in political influence.
- **2008–2016 (The Apologies):** The transition from an informal apology by Stephen Harper to a formal, state-level apology by Justin Trudeau in the House of Commons.

- **Way Forward**

- **Educational Integration:** The Komagata Maru should be as well-known in Indian schools as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, as they are two sides of the same colonial coin.
- **Transnational Archives:** India and Canada should collaborate on a digital archive that tracks the lives of all 376 passengers to humanize the statistics.
- **Policy on Diaspora:** The incident serves as a reminder for modern Indian foreign policy to actively protect and engage with the diaspora, recognizing them as stakeholders in India's global standing.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

- **Mains (2014, GS1):** "The Ghadar party was a revolutionary association... What was its role in the Indian freedom struggle?"
- **Mains (2011, GS1):** "Evaluate the influence of the Ghadar Movement on the Indian National Movement."
- **Prelims (2020):** Question regarding the Ghadar Party's headquarters and leadership.
- **Prelims (2015):** Match the following (Gurdit Singh - Komagata Maru).



# DECODING THE KOMAGATA MARU INCIDENT (1914): A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS FOR UPSC CSE

## HISTORICAL JOURNEY & KEY CONCEPTS

### Continuous Journey Regulation

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### Martial Race Theory

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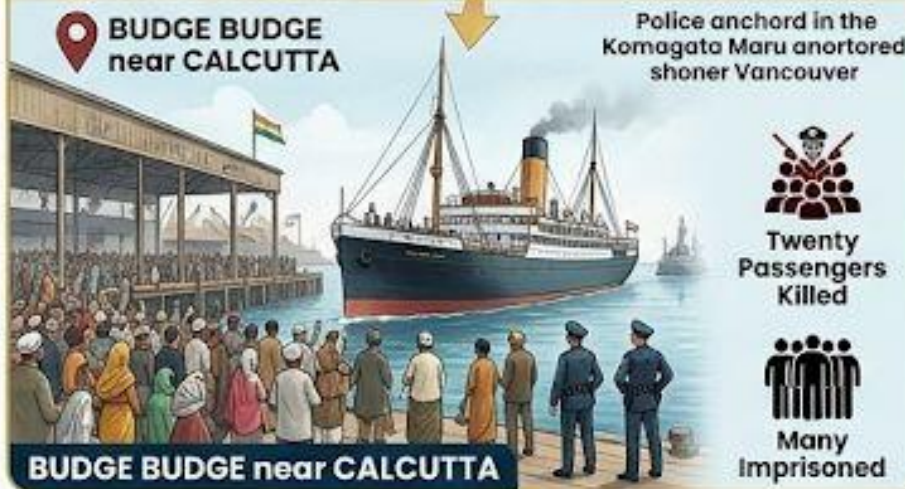
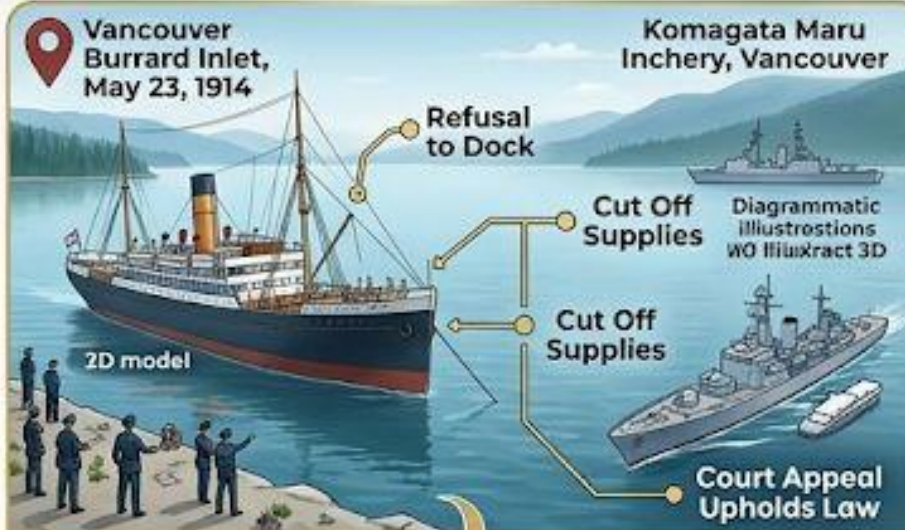
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## MAIN ARGUMENTS & THE STANDOFF



## MULTIDIMENSIONAL IMPACTS & RELEVANCE

- Social**: Social econmic, communities and social eanchation.
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- Legal**: Legal statitoners cour te pramine; shelf rednured inablity.
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- International**: International cretion: comrats to across from Vancouver
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## CHALLENGES & RECKONING

- Formal Apology (2016)**: Justin Trudeau (2016) awance anded spnster to uncomformatly mxrtars witherthe apology

## UPSC CSE SYLLABUS LINKAGES

- Map the topics directly directly intrsamt in the Komagata topics.
- GS Paper 1, 2, Essay
- GS Paper 1, 2, 4 Essay

## WAY FORWARD

- Educational Integration**: Educationa of preparation in educational integration
- Diaspora Engagement**: Dearning to continue sow Diaspora engagement
- Transnational Archives**: Inccodling intrevoltns and transnational archives

UPSC CSE PREPARATION - YOUR STRATEGIC EDGE

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# A century after legal recognition, workers still lack real protection

Since the Trade Union Act first gave workers legal recognition and protection, the law has not lived up to its intent; it preserves rights on paper but, through procedural constraints and silence on platform workers, continues to limit the ability of workers to organise and act

Pradmesh Kher

In 1908, Behan Prasad Wadia founded the Madras Labour Union, India's first trade union with regular membership and a red flag, established to address what he called the "real treatment of workers" by European officers. The union he helped build was, in the eyes of British common law, a conspiracy to restrain trade.

In 1924, a Madras court put a price on the act of organising workers against unfair working conditions. L14300 was awarded against Wadia and fellow activists for leading a strike against the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills. The management agreed to waive the payment on the condition that Wadia sever all associations with the union he had built. There was no law to protect him. The activists complied.

But even in compliance, the activists showed defiance. One of the union leaders, Venug Chidambaram Chettiar, told the judge in open court: "I am an exemplar worker for the Madras Mission. I am getting 100 per cent, with which I am living. I have only one clothes, which I am wearing, and a few spare clothes at home. If necessary, I will remove my clothes and give them to the court. On the amount of compensation ordered by you, I cannot be removed from me. At the same time, I cannot be stopped from working for the trade union of workers. Even if my clothes are removed to maintain it, a doctor, I will continue to work for the trade union by wearing my trousers. If necessary, we will go for work in rags to win our demands."

The judgment brought into the open something that had been growing in the labouring classes for decades. By 1926, India had hundreds of trade unions, yet not one had legal recognition. N.M. Joshi, its founder and General Secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC), underlined the specific nature of the problem. In March 1923, the same month as the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment, he moved a resolution at the Central Legislative Assembly recommending that the government introduce legislation to register and protect trade unions. Two years of legal and political process followed before the Act was finally passed in 1926. The Royal Commission on Labour in India, reporting in 1919, described what the struggle had been for: to get trade unions the necessary protection from civil suits and criminal laws relating to conspiracy to violate them to carry on their legitimate activities.

**Letter and spirit**

The Trade Union Act of 1926 emerged from four years of sustained pressure from the labour movement, from nationalist leaders who understood that organised workers were essential to the freedom struggle, championed by the colonial state's realisation that legal frameworks for managing workers' grievances were safer than the revolutionary alternative.

Section 11 of the Act assumed the Buckingham and Carnatic Mills judgment directly: "No suit or other legal proceeding shall be maintainable in any Civil Court against any registered Trade Union or any officer or member thereof in respect of any act done in contemplation or furtherance of a trade



SHRUTI KUMAR

dispute" including inducing breach of employment contract, or interfering with the employer's trade or business. The weapon used to silence Wadia was removed from the employer's hands. Section 17 addressed the colonial threat to office-borne or member of a registered union shall be liable under the IPC's criminal conspiracy provision, Section 120B, for agreements made at further legitimate union objects, "unless the agreement is an agreement to commit an offence."

An Indian worker now had legal recognition and legally recognised rights; a union was no longer a conspiracy. By 1928, the Goro Kanger Union in Bombay had over 75,000 members. That year saw 265 strikes involving over five lakh workers. The left wing of the labour movement, strengthened by the Act's protection, was growing fast and being with nationalist politics, as it had in 1908, when Bombay's workers struck for six days over Lokamanya Tilak's imprisonments. Two registers came simultaneously from the colonial state: The Marxist conspiracy case are arrested 10 labour organisers, even working openly, to assess the 1926 Act had made legal, and charged them not under Section 120B, where the Act's immunity held, but under workers' associations to nationalist ones, was now a criminal act.

Marthal Nehru named it plainly: "The History of India 1912: The Public Safety Bill was further, giving the executive power to act on or what people did but on what they were deemed to intend, with the Government General as judge of intention.

On October 20, 1928, months before the bill came to a vote, Lala Lajpat Rai, who had presided over the AITUC's founding session in 1920, led a powerful protest in Lahore against the all-British House-Committee. Pather Jaganmohan Jaiswal had ordered a

hats charge. But was beaten across his chest. That same evening, still standing, he addressed the crowd at Marka Gate. "I declare that the Hindus struck at me today will be the last nails in the coffin of British rule in India." The day happened days later.

At the Bombay Presidency Youth Conference in December 1928, Jawaharlal Nehru told the students: "My goodwill to the end of the century, the primary and the industrial worker... And if you do so, you will automatically avoid the perils of repression and petty compromise." By July 1929, with both bills passed and the Marist accused in custody, its analysis of the Public Safety Bill was unimpaired: "This is dangerous enough at any time and in any country to make the Executive Government the judge of what is in the mind of those opposed to it. It is far more dangerous in India, where there is a foreign government." When the government's spokesman claimed that foreign agitators had caused the country's labour unrest, Nehru was contemptuous. The actual cause was economic distress. "A strike is always self-interest and dogmatic, just as a fever is indolence and Apoplethic, but it is so good curing the fever. The wise man treats it and tries to remove the cause of it."

Three months before that analysis, on April 8, 1925, Bhaag Singh and Ramdasbhai Datt threw smoke bombs and walked from the victory gallery of the Central Legislative Assembly. The pamphlet named these provocations the Marist arrests, the bill, and the death of Lajpat Rai. "The indiscriminate arrests of labour leaders working in the open field, the lack of evidence whether the 'violence' it stood. Then came the sentence that named the whole situation: "It takes a bold voice to make the first leap."

Singh was hanged in 1931, April 23. That was transported to the Cellular Jail in the Andamans to serve a life sentence. The Marist accused spent years in prison. The Goro Kanger Union was broken. The 1926 Act's protection remained on the statute book. The letter never came to match the spirit.

**First as prologue**

The Trade Union Act was read independently and was absorbed into the

constitutional settlement. Article 19(1)(c) gave every Indian citizen the right to form associations or unions. Registered trade unions increased by 62% between 1951 and 1975. The ideological fire of the early movement cooled, over time, into wage bargaining. Then in 1980, the New Economic Policy arrived with its logic that labour flexibility was the price of growth.

In 2020, during a 16-month furlough of Parliament conducted under pandemic restrictions, with the Opposition protesting procedural irregularities, the government passed four labour codes consolidating 29 existing laws. One of them, the Industrial Relations Code 2020, absorbed the Trade Union Act 1926. It came into force on November 28, 2020.

The new Code preserves Section 11 and 17, successors to the 1926 Act's immunity provisions, in language almost identical to the original. A century's worth of protective words, barely expressed, but the distance between the letter and the spirit continues.

To be recognised as such, a negotiating union must now demonstrate 5% support among workers on the matter will, its industries characterised by high turnover, casual labour, fixed-term contracts, achieving and maintaining this numerical ceiling is a high threshold for most unions, and this is precisely to sectors where workers need protection the most. Section 42 requires 60 days' notice before a strike can begin, four times the 15 days the 1926 Trade Disputes Act demanded, the bill modelled before had already called the "History of India Bill." Workers cannot strike during consultation proceedings, or for seven days after, or during Tribunal proceedings, or for 60 days after those conclude. Between notice periods and cooling-off clauses, an employer can keep a workforce in procedural limbo without end.

Then there is the silence that reveals more than any provision. The words 'gig' and 'platform' do not appear once in the Industrial Relations Code 2020. NEU having estimated 27 million platform workers in 2020, for a law that came into force five months ago contains not a single word about the workers who run errands across every city in the country. They are legally classified as independent contractors.

**The struggle continues**

Despite the hurdles thrown their way, workers continue to organise. The Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union, the Indian Federation of App-Based Transport Workers, and the All India Gig Workers Union continue to exist, organise meetings on WhatsApp, and occasionally win. In March 2020, platform worker unions forced Domino to reverse a policy that aggregated delivery fees by food size. This decision was understood to challenge religious minority and lower caste riders by making their identities visible in a society marked by discrimination.

The Fairwork India Report 2020 assessed 11 major platforms operating in India and found that none recognised a collective body of workers or a trade union. Food Stacks alone now passed social security laws for platform workers, welfare benefits designed, with some care, to make the struggle for collective bargaining seem unnecessary.

The law has not been written less. The law writes are still necessary.

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Trade Union:** A voluntary association of workers formed to protect their rights and improve their working conditions through collective bargaining. *Example: The Madras Labour Union (1918) was India's first organized union with regular membership fees.*
- **Conspiracy to Restrain Trade:** A legal doctrine under British Common Law used to criminalize labor organizing by arguing that strikes interfered with a merchant's right to conduct business.
- **Collective Bargaining:** The process of negotiation between employers and a group of employees (union) aimed at agreements to regulate working salaries, working conditions, and other worker rights.
- **Gig/Platform Workers:** Individuals who perform work through digital platforms (like Zomato, Swiggy, or Uber) on a task-by-task basis. They are often classified as "independent contractors" rather than employees.
- **Industrial Relations (IR) Code 2020:** A modern piece of legislation that consolidated three central labor laws (including the Trade Unions Act, 1926) to streamline labor regulations in India.
- **Conciliation Proceedings:** A non-adversarial process where a neutral third party (conciliator) helps the employer and the union reach an amicable settlement during a dispute.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The central thesis of the narrative is the **widening gap between the 'letter' of the law and its 'spirit.'** While India has transitioned from a colonial regime to a democratic republic, the legal mechanisms used to control labor have remained remarkably persistent.
- **The Paradox of Legal Immunity:** The 1926 Act provided immunity from civil and criminal conspiracy charges, yet the colonial state used "Sedition" and "Public Safety" laws to arrest leaders. Today, while the 2020 Code retains these immunities, procedural hurdles (like a 60-day notice period) make exercising the right to strike nearly impossible.
- **The Erasure of the Modern Worker:** A significant portion of the article argues that the new labor codes have ignored the **7.7 million gig workers.** By failing to define them as "employees," the law denies them the right to form recognized unions, effectively pushing them back to a pre-1926 status where they have no legal standing.
- **The Weaponization of Procedure:** The article highlights that by setting a high bar for union recognition (51% support) and lengthy cooling-off periods, the state has replaced outright prohibition with "procedural suspension."

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The history of labor rights in India is a story of resistance against both economic exploitation and political subjugation.
- **1918–1921 (The Formative Years):** The Madras Labour Union was founded by B.P. Wadia. The landmark **Buckingham and Carnatic Mills case (1921)** proved that without specific legislation, unionists could be sued for "damages" caused by strikes.
- **1926 (The Legislative Milestone):** The **Trade Unions Act, 1926** was passed, granting legal personality to unions and protecting members from civil/criminal liability for legitimate trade disputes.
- **1928–1929 (The Colonial Backlash):** As unions became more involved in the nationalist movement, the British introduced the **Trade Disputes Act** and the **Public Safety Bill** to curb "political" strikes and arrest leaders (e.g., the Meerut Conspiracy Case).
- **1950–1990 (Post-Independence Expansion):** Labor rights were enshrined in the Constitution. Trade unions grew significantly in number and focused largely on wage bargaining within the public sector.
- **1991–Present (The Neoliberal Shift):** Following the New Economic Policy, the focus shifted toward "labor flexibility." This culminated in the **Industrial Relations Code, 2020**, which seeks to balance ease of doing business with labor protection.

- **Way Forward**

- **Inclusive Definition:** Expand the definition of "worker" in the Industrial Relations Code to explicitly include gig and platform workers.
- **Streamlined Recognition:** Lower the threshold for a "negotiating union" to a more realistic percentage (e.g., 30%) to ensure collective bargaining is functional.
- **Social Security Fund:** Implement the social security provisions for the unorganized sector immediately, as seen in some states, to provide a safety net.
- **Digital Democracy:** Encourage platforms to recognize "digital unions" and engage in algorithmic transparency so workers understand how they are being evaluated.

- **Previous Years' Questions (PYQs)**

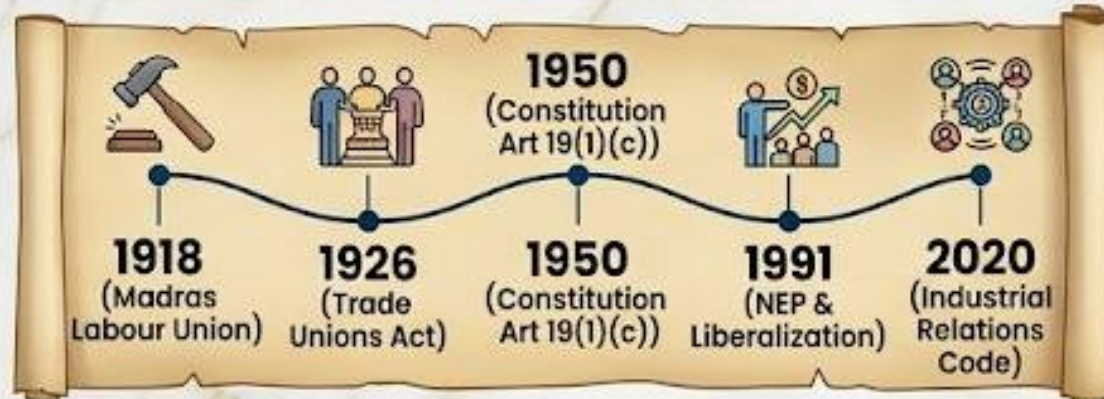
- **Mains 2017 (GS 2):** "The trade union movement in India has faced various challenges. Discuss the impact of LPG reforms on the trade union movement."
- **Mains 2021 (GS 3):** "Examine the role of the Gig Economy in the process of empowerment of women in India."
- **Prelims 2021:** Question on the "Trade Disputes Act of 1929" (Provision of strike notice).
- **Mains 2020 (GS 2):** "The labor codes aim to simplify labor laws but have raised concerns regarding worker protections. Critically analyze."



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## THE CHRONICLE OF INDIAN TRADE UNION LAW



### THE COLONIAL LEGACY (1918-1929)



- Conspiracy to Restrain Trade Doctrine
- Buckingham & Carnatic Mills Strike
- £2,000 Damages Case
- Vengal Chakkarai Chettiar's Defiance
- Trade Disputes Bill vs. Freedom Struggles



### THE DIGITAL CHALLENGE (PRESENT DAY)



- Gig Economy Paradox
- 7.7 Million Platform Workers
- Excluded from IRS Code?
- Procedural Suspension (60-day notice)
- Identity-Based Collective Actions (WhatsApp Unions)

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# Hezbollah's new weapon against Israel: fibre-optic drones honed in Ukraine war

Unlike other drones, these small, hard-to-track and potentially lethal weapons are almost impossible to electronically jam: experts say militaries must either intercept them – difficult due to their size and short flight path – or find a way to sever the nearly invisible cable linking them to the operator

Associated Press  
TEL AVIV

Hezbollah has launched a new weapon against northern Israel in the latest round of fighting: small drones controlled with fibre-optic cables the width of dental floss that avoid electronic detection. These drones – used widely in the war in Ukraine – are small, hard to track and potentially lethal.

Many drones are susceptible to electronic jamming by air defences. Jamming can cause a drone to crash or return to its point of origin.

But fibre-optic drones are not controlled remotely. They have a thin cable that connects an operator directly to the drone, making it impossible to electronically jam.

The drones are not infallible because the wind – or other drones – can cause the cables to tangle.

But, “if you know what you’re doing, it’s absolutely deadly,” said Robert Tolst, a drone expert and researcher at the Royal United Services Institute in London, explaining how the drone can fly low and creep up on a target.

Experts say militaries must either intercept the drones, which is difficult due to their small size and short flight path, or find a way to snip the nearly invisible cable.

Hezbollah – the Iran-

backed militant group in Lebanon – has mostly been using the fibre optic drones on Israeli soldiers operating in southern Lebanon or towns on the border.

Here’s a closer look at these weapons.

An Israeli military official told AP the fibre optic drones are a relatively new threat during the latest round of fighting with Hezbollah. Hezbollah seems to have turned to them because Israeli air defences have been successful against larger and more powerful rockets, missiles and other drones, said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity in line with military guidelines.

Israel believes the drones are made locally and are easy to produce – requiring little more than an off-the-shelf drone, a small amount of explosives, and transparent wire that is readily available on the consumer market, he said.

He called the drones the biggest threat to troops inside Lebanon but said the Israeli military is working on technological solutions. In the meantime, Israel is taking measures on the ground to defend troops, such as adding nets and cages to military vehicles.

The fibre-optic drones are the latest part of a cat-and-mouse race as Israel’s high-tech defences race to intercept new threats, es-



**Tried and tested:** A Ukrainian-made FPV fibre-optic drone is displayed at a military market place in Kyiv, Ukraine. AP

pecially ones that are less sophisticated.

Ran Kochav, a former head of the Israeli military’s air defence command, said Israel is failing in its attempts to defend against the fibre-optic drones.

“They fly very low and very fast, and are very small, it’s very difficult to detect them, and even after they’re detected, they are really hard to track,” he said.

Mr. Kochav said Israel spent years focusing on strengthening its air defence systems to improve protection against rockets and missiles. But drones were not seen as a top priority.

He said Israel should have been following the advances in fibre-optic drones in the war in Ukraine and assumed that

like Russia, other Iranian allies would eventually use them.

Throughout the war in Ukraine, Moscow and Kyiv have been engaged in a race to develop new technology.

Russia punnels Ukraine almost nightly with Shabed long-range attack drones – originally from Iran. Although Moscow has made many improvements to the drones, some can still be taken down by electronic jamming.

Fibre-optic drones were developed to get around that problem – although they do not have the same range as a drone that uses a radio link or artificial intelligence to navigate.

In some cases, fibre-optic drones have been recorded with cables extending as far as 31 miles (50 kilometres) said Mr. Tol-

st, the expert in London.

Russia and Ukraine are using many different types of drones “at a phenomenal scale,” he said.

The fibre-optic drones are in such wide use that footage shows from-line Ukrainian towns coated with shiny, fishing line-like strings, resembling massive spiderwebs shimmering in the sunlight.

Israel has sufficient firepower to intercept drones, but the key is early detection, Mr. Kochav said.

He explained that Israel already has suitable technology that tracks changes in light, identifies signals and communications, and can recognise the sound of drone propellers.

But he said these monitoring systems haven’t been widely deployed along the northern border.

Over the past weeks, Hezbollah has aired videos through social media platforms and its Al-Manar TV station of attacks with these new drones, especially against Israeli troops in southern Lebanon.

These attacks have captured public attention. One attack killed one Israeli soldier and wounded six others, some of them seriously, last weekend. Another attack, on Tuesday, killed an Israeli civilian contractor in southern Lebanon.

In the attack that killed the soldier, Hezbollah issued a video taken by the drone until it exploded in the middle of troops gath-

ering near a vehicle.

Another drone was fired at the same location as a military helicopter landed to evacuate the wounded but narrowly missed.

Hezbollah announced that it began using fibre-optic guided drones for the first time during the round of fighting that began March 2, after using other types of drones for years.

Israel also has a fleet of drones that carry out surveillance and attacks, though not necessarily with the fibre-optic cables, to target Hezbollah militants.

Zevik Glödel, a 78-year-old math teacher and volunteer ambulance driver, discovered coils of the translucent fibre-optic cables surrounding a drone that crashed into his backyard in the northern Israeli city of Kiryat Shmona on April 13. He was sitting at home when he heard a high-pitched shriek and a small crash. His neighbour yelled the yard was on fire.

The two of them put out the fire with a garden hose but noticed something new: the destroyed drone was surrounded by loops and curls of a white thread.

He said the bomb squad that responded called it a miracle that nearly 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of explosives failed to detonate. “They picked up all of the pieces that they could pick up, and left me a few optical fibres as a keepsake.”

- **Key Terms and Explanations**

- **Fibre-Optic Guided Drone:** A drone controlled via a physical spool of micro-fibre optic cable. Unlike traditional drones that use radio waves, this physical link transmits data and video directly between the operator and the craft.
- **Electronic Jamming (Electronic Warfare - EW):** The use of electromagnetic energy to disrupt or "drown out" the communication signals (GPS or radio) of a device. A jammed drone typically loses its "eyes" or its connection to the pilot.
- **Off-the-shelf (OTS) Technology:** Commercial products available to the general public (like hobbyist drones) that are repurposed for military use, lowering the cost of entry for non-state actors.
- **Short Flight Path / Low-Altitude Flight:** Tactical maneuvers where drones fly close to the ground to avoid radar detection, utilizing terrain features (hills, buildings) as cover.
- **Hard-kill vs. Soft-kill Measures:** "Soft-kill" refers to electronic jamming; "hard-kill" refers to physical destruction using projectiles, nets, or lasers.

- **Main Arguments and Substantive Parts**

- The central thesis of the current shift in asymmetric warfare is the "**Un-jammable Drone.**" The article highlights how non-state actors like Hezbollah are adapting to sophisticated air defenses (like the Iron Dome) by regressing to physical, tethered technology.
- **Immunity to EW:** Since there is no radio signal to intercept or scramble, traditional electronic warfare suites are rendered useless. The drone remains responsive regardless of the intensity of local jamming.
- **The Cost-Benefit Asymmetry:** A drone costing a few hundred dollars, equipped with "dental floss" thick cable and basic explosives, can neutralize multi-million dollar military assets or stall high-tech troop movements.
- **The Vulnerability of Detection:** High-tech militaries have historically optimized for "metal in the sky" (missiles) or "signals in the air" (radio). A small, silent, plastic drone flying low creates a "detection gap" that is currently being exploited.
- **The Physical Trade-off:** The primary counter-argument to the dominance of these drones is their physical fragility. The cable can snap, tangle in trees, or be severed by the wind, limiting their use to specific environmental conditions.

- **Historical Evolution of the Issue**

- The trajectory of drone warfare has moved from high-altitude strategic assets to "democratized" tactical tools:
- **Phase 1 (Post-9/11):** Use of large, expensive drones like the Predator for surveillance and targeted strikes by major powers.
- **Phase 2 (The ISIS Era):** Non-state actors begin using commercial quadcopters for reconnaissance and dropping small grenades, leading to the birth of "Counter-UAS" (C-UAS) technology.
- **Phase 3 (Ukraine Conflict 2022-Present):** Massive escalation in First-Person View (FPV) drones. The rapid development of EW led to the "Fibre-Optic" innovation to bypass the digital blockade.
- **Phase 4 (Current Middle East Escalation):** Proliferation of these "lessons learned" in Ukraine to other theaters, specifically by Hezbollah against Israel, marking the globalized nature of modern insurgent tactics.

- **Way Forward**

- **Acoustic & Optical Sensors:** Shifting from radio-detection to microphones (to hear propellers) and high-speed cameras (to see movement).
- **Directed Energy Weapons (DEW):** Using lasers to melt the drone or the wire rather than trying to jam the signal.
- **Point Defense:** Widespread use of "slat armor" or physical netting over sensitive military and civilian installations.
- **Intelligence-led Preemption:** Focusing on the manufacturing sites of these "off-the-shelf" drones rather than trying to catch them in flight.

- **Previous Years' UPSC Questions**

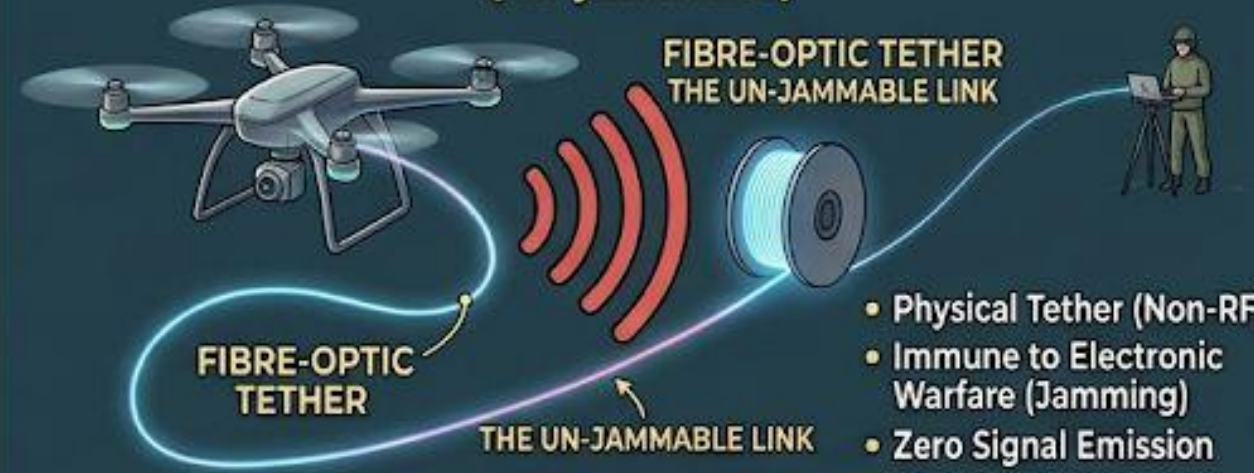
- **UPSC 2023 (GS 3):** "The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) by our adversaries across the borders to smuggle arms/drugs is a serious threat... Discuss the measures being taken."
- **UPSC 2019 (GS 3):** "What is Cyber Warfare? Outline the various threats to which a country can be exposed."

# UPSC CSE ANALYTICAL DOSSIER: THE FIBRE-OPTIC DRONE THREAT

## CONVENTIONAL RADIO-CONTROLLED DRONE VS (Vulnerable to Jamming)



## FIBRE-OPTIC TETHERED DRONE (Un-jammable)



### KEY FEATURES & EVOLUTION

- Ukraine Hezbollah
- Low-cost (OTS) Tech
- Tactical Innovation from Global Conflicts
- Short Flight Path, Low-Altitude
- HD Video Feed without Latency

### CHALLENGES & STRATEGIC IMPACT

- Extreme Cost-Asymmetry
- Exploits Detection Gaps
- Fragile physical wire: Wind/Snagging risk
- Complex Pilot Skills Needed

### MULTIDIMENSIONAL UPSC ANALYSIS

- Social: Civilian Fear & Psychological Impact
- Economic: Cost-Effective Insurgency vs. High-Cost
- Legal/Ethical: Distinction & Attributability Challenges
- International: Proliferation & Axis Technology Transfer

### THE WAY FORWARD & UPSC LINKAGES

- New Detection: Acoustic & Optical Sensors
- Hard-kill: Directed Energy (Lasers) & Point Defense Nets
- Link: GS 3 Security, S&T, Cyber Warfare; Essay Topics

### UPSC PYQs & MODEL ANSWER THEMES

- Analyze modern asymmetric threats (e.g., drone smuggling)
- Technology as a critical vulnerability in warfare
- Structure for a model GS 3 answer on new weapon



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